

# Representative Council Organizational Model for ORMA

## Summary

The proposed organizational structure (see Figure 1 below) was developed to maximize the potential of ORMA to achieve the broad goals of Our Revolution in a manner that encourages organizing and building an expanding democratic movement. This structure emphasizes engaging members with major decisions decided through voting while minimizing the daily burden on people by having a representative council that handles administration and time-sensitive decisions. In this way, it maximizes member participation but is able to act efficiently and quickly when necessary. Much of the work is done through committees that harness the skills and interests of members to organize and mobilize action. Coordination of the committees is achieved through the Representative Council which must send at least one member to every committee. The basic units of this proposed structure are local affiliates, although unaffiliated members also have representation. Affiliates are important because they 1) encourage growth and create community, 2) promote opportunity for a thorough understanding of issues through collective discussions, and 3) promote member coordination and activism so OR can be maximally effective making the largest impact. In this document we describe the proposed model components and processes.

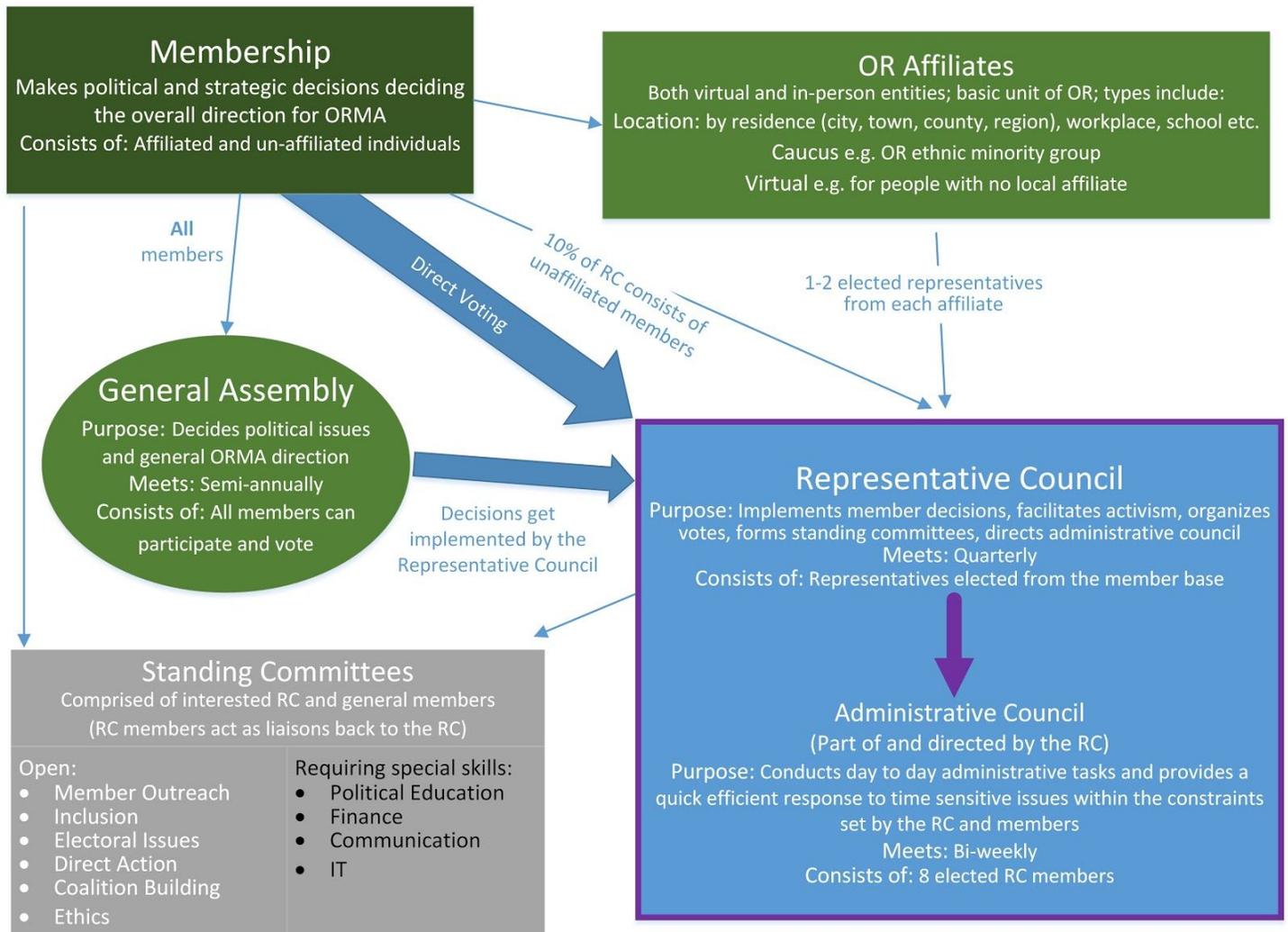


Figure 1: Representative Council Model

The proposed organizational structure (see Figure 1 above) was developed to maximize the potential of ORMA to achieve the broad goals of Our Revolution in a manner that encourages organizing and building an expanding democratic movement. Toward that end it has the following components and processes:

## Membership and Affiliates

- a. **Membership:** Individuals who are a resident, work in MA, or otherwise identify as Massachusettsan, and that participates in one OR affiliate or state level meeting and/or donate money to the national, state, or local OR organizations. This definition is compatible with OR National's definition of a member.
- b. **Affiliates:**
  - i. Affiliates are the basic unit of organization and can exist in-person or virtually.
    1. Affiliates are considered important because they:
      - a. Encourage growth and create community.
      - b. Promote more opportunity for thorough understanding of issues through collective discussions
      - c. Promote coordination and activism so OR can be maximally effective making the largest impact
    2. Although members are encouraged to affiliate, they are not required to do so. We recognize that individuals may want to participate in different degrees. ORMA will meet them where they are but provide ample opportunity for them to increase their involvement.
  - ii. To qualify as an OR Affiliate in MA, a group must have:
    1. At least ten members
    2. Hold regular meetings, at least quarterly
    3. Maintain a membership list
  - iii. There are three types of affiliates:
    1. Geographically based by area of residence (e.g., city/town, county, region), school, workplace etc.
    2. Caucus based (e.g., Ethnic minority caucus, Feminist caucus, LBGQT+ caucus etc.)
    3. Virtually based affiliates serve members who:
      - a. Live in areas where an in-person affiliate has not been established or there are not sufficient numbers to develop an in-person affiliate
      - b. Are not able to participate in in-person meetings due to mobility issues, etc.

Note: If members are in more than one affiliate (e.g, a caucus and a geographically based one) for state election purposes they may chose only to affiliate with one; for local elections they may vote in both if allowed by both affiliates.
  - iv. All members may participate in:
    1. In the General Assembly; (see below)
    2. State level elections for endorsements for statewide candidates/legislation/ballot initiatives and non-electoral campaigns and initiatives (e.g., direct action) and other issues where the Representative Council seeks guidance; see below
      - a. Although statewide votes are cast individually, Affiliates will be encouraged to hold discussions prior to each statewide vote in order to encourage collective discussion and analysis prior to voting. The RC will arrange for online forums for un-affiliated members to have a similar opportunity to discuss issues prior to votes
    3. Run for membership in the Representative Council in accordance with certain criteria; see below

## Elected Representative Council (RC)

### a. *Representative Council member responsibilities:*

- i. Administrative work including drafting materials for and managing online votes; day to day administrative work would be conducted by the Administrative Council (AC described below)
- ii. Participating in standing committees; see below for description of standing committees
  1. The RC is responsible for sending at least one member to each Standing Committee
  2. Each RC member must participate in at least one committee and not more than two
    - a. Non-RC members can also participate in these committees
- iii. Sharing information across standing committees and affiliates
- iv. Framing questions for statewide votes.<sup>1</sup> Issues that should be submitted for statewide votes include:
  1. Endorsements for statewide candidates/legislation/ballot initiatives, and non-electoral campaigns and initiatives (e.g., direct action)
    - a. Where a campaign has been endorsed by the members, the RC can endorse specific associated actions without a vote (e.g., if membership endorses an educational ballot initiative, the RC can endorse specific relevant rallies)
  2. Prioritizing which issues ORMA will commit efforts and resources
- v. Facilitating the development of in-person and virtual affiliates (see above)
- vi. Attending a quarterly meeting held in varying locations around the state
- vii. Forming an **Administrative Committee (AC)**
  1. Membership: The RC will elect an 8 person body from its members
  2. AC members serve one year terms staggered by six months
    - a. However, during the first year only, half of the AC members would be limited to a six month term.
  3. The AC will meet every two weeks via telecoms but will hold emergency meetings as necessary
  4. Duties include referring inquiries to appropriate committee spokespersons and performing administrative tasks necessary for the day to day running of the organization (e.g., organizing polls, administrative work associated with elections, ensuring that meetings take place, maintaining records, etc.)
  5. The AC will have the authority to make decisions on issues that are very time constrained and urgent (e.g., endorsing and mobilizing for a large demonstration for an urgent issue that will occur within a matter of days). See below for how other decisions are made.
  6. The RC will supervise the AC's work and ensure that it does not overstep its mission. The AC is not intended to serve as an executive body.

### b. *Representative Council decision-making process*

- i. All decisions by the RC require a 60 percent majority.
- ii. If decisions fail to meet the 60 percent threshold:
  1. If the RC is able to discuss and vote a second time during the same session it may do so; if that is not possible then the decision must be submitted for a membership vote
  2. If the RC holds a second vote and it fails to reach the 60% threshold, then the decision must be submitted for a membership vote
  3. The RC may also elect to send decisions out for a membership vote if they believe that they require further direction for any reason.

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<sup>1</sup> Affiliates are responsible for local issues, such as endorsing and/or prioritizing local campaigns and endorsing local candidates

**c. Representative Council Composition**

The RC is comprised of both affiliated and non-affiliated members; see above for definition of members and affiliates

1. Affiliate-based RC members
  2. Each large affiliate (i.e., is in the top 50th percentile of membership) will have two representatives
  3. Each small affiliate (i.e., is in the bottom 50th percentile of membership) will have one representative
  4. Affiliates determine voting-rights within their Affiliate. ORMA rules govern voting rights on statewide issues only
- ii. Unaffiliated RC Members: Unaffiliated members can elect a number of representatives equal to no more than 10% of the number of affiliate representatives in the RC.
1. Unaffiliated representatives will serve for a maximum of 1 year
  2. Unaffiliated members will be encouraged to join an affiliate; see above for why affiliate membership is considered important.
- iii. The majority of council members will be affiliated so that they can maintain a connection to the grassroots. Because unaffiliated members have no defined OR grassroots community, it is difficult for them to maintain such a connection.
- iv. Inclusion: Affiliates would be encouraged to consider inclusionary factors when selecting representatives

**d. Representative Council Elected Terms:**

- i. RC members would serve two year terms, staggered for continuity, with half the RC selected each year
  1. During the first year only, half of the RC members would be elected to standard two years terms and half to one year terms. Beginning in the second year, all terms will be for two years.
    - a. For the first year only, large affiliates select one representative to serve for one year.
    - b. For the first year only and based on a random lottery, half of the small Affiliate representatives will serve for one year.
  2. To encourage affiliates to develop new leadership, RC members may not serve for more than 2 consecutive terms

## **General Assembly (GA)**

The GA is comprised of all ORMA members who convene twice a year to discuss major issues facing the organization, the state, and the nation.

- a. The General Assembly sets a broad general agenda for the RC.
- b. Members of allied organizations will be invited to participate but may not vote unless affiliated individually with ORMA.

## Standing Committees

Standing Committees are composed of both RC and non-RC members. Each standing committee will have an RC member who serves as a liaison to the RC as a whole in addition to a facilitator who may or may not be an RC member. Standing committees will include but are not necessarily limited to:

### a. Committees that anyone can join based on interest

- i. **Member Outreach (e.g, member/new affiliate support):** This will include running a new member group which orients new members and helps them find an in-person or virtual affiliate home; this committee will also help with the formation of new affiliates
- ii. **Inclusion:** A committee comprised of primarily underrepresented individuals responsible for ensuring our processes, events, etc will be of an inclusive nature to all.
- iii. **Electoral Issues (state and national level elections/ballot measures/legislative Issues):** in some instances may work closely with the Coalition Building Committee
- iv. **Direct Action:** Works on direct actions such as rallies, guerilla theater (e.g., die-ins), etc. In many instances may work closely with the Coalition Building Committee
- v. **Coalition Building:** Outreach and coordination with other organizations; will work with iii and iv
- vi. **Ethics:** Responsible for establishing processes required to solve internal and external ethical issues including but not restricted to:
  1. Representing the interests of the individual member by investigating and addressing complaints of mal-administration and/or violations of rights (e.g. racial or gender discrimination)
  2. Mediating in disputes between two individuals, between an individual and an entity (Affiliates, RC, GA and SC) or between entities
  3. Investigating and addressing issues pertaining to financial malfeasance.
  4. The ethics committee may choose to appoint individuals, such as ombudspersons and/or mediators, to adjudicate these complaints provided that such individuals possess the appropriate skill sets for such work as determined by the Ethics Standing Committee.

### b. Committees that require specific skill-sets as determined by the RC. The RC will develop skills list and are responsible for the review of applications:

- i. IT, Communication Technology, and Graphic Support.
- ii. Fundraising and Finances.
- iii. Communications support (e.g. social media and press releases etc. maintain a speakers bureau; do not provide but can edit content which comes from the relevant committees).
- iv. Political Education and Training (e.g., run reading groups, organize training on particular areas such as lobbying, canvassing, non-violent civil disobedience, organize lectures)

## ORMA Representative Council Model Responses to Common Questions

**a. How does the proposed model promote inclusion (e.g., racial/ethnic, socio-economic class, gender, sexual orientation, persons with disabilities, age, other...)?**

**Answer:**

We believe that the essence of inclusion comes through our political work not the model. Nonetheless, we strove to incorporate components that serve to promote structural inclusion as much as possible. These are:

- A specific standing committee dedicated to these issues that can work not only with similar groups but also reach out to groups that represent marginalized individuals
- Caucus affiliates that can provide a safe space and voice for members of marginalized groups
- Welcoming space for new members including those from marginalized groups; will work to help them find a safe affiliate home and will help support, promote and foster participation into leadership opportunities (e.g., affiliate building, caucus creation/involvement, committee roles and elected positions)
- Opportunity for participation at multiple levels depending on available time
- Opportunity to connect online if in-person meetings are difficult because of disability, geography, etc.
- Encouragement of affiliates to consider inclusionary factors when selecting representatives

### **b. Membership**

**i. What constitutes membership? Are there to be different levels of membership and if so why and what are they?**

**Answer:**

There is only one level of membership. Individual affiliates are allowed to define their own membership requirements as long as they are compatible with those set by OR national. In addition, Affiliates may regulate statewide voting rights for RC elections among their members. Although members may be unaffiliated, they can elect unaffiliated representatives to the RC for a maximum of 1 year term. ORMA members are strongly encouraged to join affiliates and the organization has a process in place to encourage affiliation. Affiliation is important because it:

- Encourages growth and more thorough understanding of issues through collective discussions.
- Creates community and helps to grow the movement.
- Promote coordination and activism so OR can be maximally effective making the largest impact

ii. **How is the proposed model representative of membership?**

**Answer:**

- **General Assembly:** Comprised of all ORMA members. It convenes twice a year to discuss major issues facing the organization and the state; it sets a broad agenda for the Representative Council to implement.
- **Representative council**
  - Is a broadly representative council that carries out an agenda set by an all member General Assembly and via online votes. Meets quarterly and elects an eight member Administrative Council to ensure agenda items are carried out in a timely fashion. Groups that the council represents include:
    - Members of geographical based affiliates (geographical area is broadly construed as where one lives, works, goes to school, etc.)
    - Members of caucuses (e.g., Ethnic Minority Caucus, Feminist Caucus, LBGQT+, etc.)
    - Members of virtual affiliates (e.g., for individuals in areas where there are not sufficient numbers or who are not able to participate in-person meetings due to physical disability, age etc.)
    - Members that do not belong to an affiliate can elect
      - No more than 10% of the number of affiliate representatives in the Representative Council; such representatives will serve one year terms only as the goal is to encourage members to affiliate (see why affiliate membership is important above)

Note: If members are in more than one affiliate (e.g, a caucus and a geographically based one) for state election purposes, they may chose to affiliate with only one; for local elections, affiliates determine voting rules.

***c. How does the proposed organizational model enable grassroots organization:***

- i. What voices is it important to hear and why?***
- ii. How does this model facilitate those voices being heard?***

**Answer to i and ii above:**

- The model seeks to maximize participation and voices from the grassroots through membership in affiliates. Membership in an affiliate can encourage political growth and a more thorough understanding of issues through collective discussions. It also creates community and helps to grow the movement. The Affiliate voice is channeled through the Representative Council. The council is designed to maximize input from a wide range of groups including those that are geographically based and those that represent marginalized groups; the council also hears from representatives of unaffiliated members, although affiliation is encouraged because the benefits it provides to the individual and the movement
- Members voice is also heard through:
  - The General Assembly; all members may participate in the general assembly which provides general direction for the Representative Council
  - Direct votes for such issues as candidate endorsement

- Members are encouraged to participate in standing and temporary committees and working groups according to their areas of expertise and interest; committees and working groups will do much of the work.

**d. What is the best balance between Mobilizing and Organizing, why? How does this model foster the balance between mobilizing and organizing?**

*Mobilizing defined as: Muster/rally membership to engage in particular actions such as canvassing, petition drives, and rallies*

*Organizing defined as: Building a social/political movement by recruiting community members/supporters as defined elsewhere and engaging them in developing shared goals and collective action*

**Answer:**

We believe that mobilizing and organizing are both essential parts of a grassroots movement. Certain organizational structures and processes are better suited to each of these goals. As described above, affiliate membership encourages growth and a more thorough understanding of issues through collective discussions. It also creates community and helps to grow the movement. Because of these qualities, it provides the best vehicle for organizing. It can also help to mobilize at the local level. Mobilization, as the name implies, has a significant logistical component. The shared resources and knowledge of the large organization can be valuable when mobilizing, especially for statewide issues. The Representative Council, through the Administrative Council and its committees, may be best suited to lead this sort of work. Where quick action is need, like in the event of an urgent or emergency situation, the Administrative Council is bested suited to this task.

**e. How would different types of decisions be made in the proposed organizational model?**

**i. Why you made particular choices regarding decision process for different types of decisions (e.g., mission, broad strategies, endorsement of political campaigns/legislation/ballot initiatives, organizing and participating in direct action, etc)**

**Answer:**

Decisions are made at the lowest level, balancing democratic process, efficiency/member burden, and meeting urgent needs. As such:

- The General Assembly democratically makes decisions about mission and broad strategy at the state level
- Member votes determine what political campaigns, legislation, and ballot initiatives OR will endorse at the state level
- The Representative Council can endorse specific actions if a state level campaign has been endorsed by membership vote (e.g., Rally for endorsed campaign); the Representative Council is also responsible for framing statewide issues for votes and for framing state level administrative policies in accordance with bylaws

- Administrative Council makes emergency decisions about urgent actions at the state level
- Affiliates make all local decisions and the extent to which it will participate in and provide resources to state endorsed actions according to its own priorities, available resources, and rules (e.g., State may endorse a RUM petition drive)
- Individual members decide if they want personally to participate in any activities initiated at the local, or national level

**ii. *How do you handle time sensitive decisions?***

**Answer:** The Administrative Council makes time sensitive decisions

**iii. *How do you handle decisions that are not time sensitive?***

**Answer:** See i above.

**f. *How would coalition work with other groups occur within the proposed model?***

**Answer:** We propose a dedicated standing committee to develop processes and to assist issue based working groups as needed.

**g. *Should there be any standing committees?***

- If yes, what should they be and why?**
- If no, why not?**

**Answer:** We believe that much of the work ORMA should be done through standing committees. We have proposed a suggested list of committees that cover a range of electoral and direct action work. We expect that there will be long and short term working groups that will develop out of these committees. We also propose service committees such as Ethics, IT, and Finance. Finally, we propose committees that meet the organizations need to grow (Outreach) and be inclusionary (Inclusion). Overtime, we anticipate that the needs of the organization will change based on its own evolution and political circumstance. The Representative Council will be responsible for evaluating these changing needs.

**h. *Why did you select the use of particular terms (e.g., executive board versus steering committee, representative council versus spokescouncil, etc.)?***

**Answer:** We debated about whether to call local groups chapters or affiliates. We selected the term affiliate to signify that they are voluntary affiliates of ORMA rather than under it. Although spokescouncil is a common name for a representative council similar to the body we describe, we selected the name Representative Council because it is less jargony and thus transparent to the general public. We selected other terms to be similarly transparent.

***i. If you include particular offices (e.g., President, Council Leaders, etc) vs general positions (Council member), explain their roles and why they are necessary.***

**Answer:** Not applicable

***j. If include term limits, please describe their rationale.***

**Answer:**

- Representative Council terms allow for stability of membership and growth of skills necessary for these positions with constant openings to allow for development of new leaders.
- Administrative Council terms are shorter than Representative Council terms to
  - Avoid burnout
  - Further the sharing of responsibilities
  - Avoiding potential “over consolidation of power” in the hands of a few individuals

***k. What trade-offs does the model make and why?***

**Answer:** The model trades some degree of ‘efficiency’ in favor of democracy and organizing and movement building. We believe that an organization that seeks to build a more democratic and just society than what currently exists, should reflect these values in its own organization.

***l. How does your model empower ORMA to build a statewide political strategy?***

**Answer:** The General Assembly sets general strategy in a participatory way. The Representative Council, which is composed of elected representatives of individual affiliates as well as of unaffiliated members, works through the Administrative Council and Standing Committees to coordinate the work and to promote joint decision making across the state.

***m. How does your model contribute to building a long term strategy?***

**Answer:** The model provides forums, such as the General Assembly, to promote discussions and further understanding of important political issues. Further, the model is based on a truly democratic structure empowering statewide decisionmaking. Hence, this model ensures that decisions on long term strategies are developed collectively to address the needs of members and affected communities across the state.

***n. How does your model promote efficiency and timeliness of decision-making while ensuring accountability at all levels?***

**Answer:** The model considers affiliates the fundamental unit of the organization. It is accountable through affiliate representatives. Most decision are made by direct votes or the Representative Council (RC), as appropriate. Very little of what we do is of an emergency nature. However, when urgent decision making is required, an eight member Administrative Council (AC), elected by the RC, is empowered to make such decisions consistent with policy set by the General Assembly (GA) and the RC. The AC is accountable to the entire membership via the GA and RC.

***o. How does your model promote efficiency of operations?***

**Answer:** Our model allows for expedience when required via the Administrative Council which can act quickly when needed. As described above, however, much of what we do does not need to happen immediately. Further as much of the work will occur through the committees, the AC can also reach out to specific standing committees who can offer aid and expertise and consultation in a timely manner.

***p. How does your model balance the need for direct, participatory democracy and the need for leadership?***

**Answer:** The structure includes a Representative Council (RC) whose decision making is constrained within the confines defined by the membership via the General Assembly (GA) as well as via online votes. We value participation and movement building over hierarchical leadership and as such, propose a somewhat flat organization that is led from the grassroots. Therefore, when possible, we propose that decisions are made through democratic participatory processes either via direct vote, the GA, or the RC. We view the Representative Council and Administrative Council (AC) more as service bodies than seats of leadership. But we also recognize the need for quick decision making in certain circumstances; therefore we propose an AC that is empowered to deal with emergencies. Finally, the organization will value expertise and professionalism. Therefore certain committees, or positions on them, will require specific skills (e.g., policy, organizing skills, mobilizing, electoral politics, mass action, finance, legal, mediation, IT, writing, PR, social media, etc.) so that they can best serve the organization and its goals. Additionally, there will be other committees specifically devoted to education & ethics that will draw on internal as well as external expertise. We will also encourage members who have specific expertise to educate and train other members so as to increase capacity within the movement.