

The Occupied Wall Street Spokes Council Proposal

Submitted by the Structure Working Group

SUMMARY

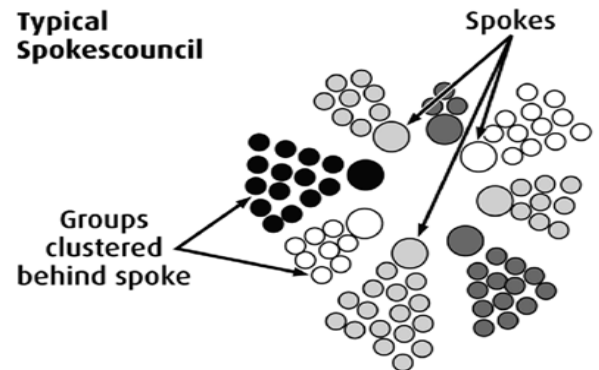
With the unbelievable success and growth of our movement over the past month, we find ourselves in need of a more transparent, accountable and functional structure for Working Groups and Caucuses to communicate, collaborate, and make decisions together, including holistic budgetary decisions. This structure would not replace the General Assembly, the morning check-in or the occupiers meeting, but rather complement them.

In order to maintain the non-hierarchical and directly democratic nature of OWS, while encouraging more functional, accountable, and transparent processes, we propose that we institute a Spokes Council comprised of all Working Groups and Caucuses. This is a structure and process that we can evolve and change as our needs grow.

WHAT IS A SPOKES COUNCIL?

A spokes council is a structure that has been used widely by democratic movements since the Spanish Revolution, and draws inspiration from many indigenous struggles such as the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. It was used effectively and for many years in Anti-Nuclear (80's) and Global Justice (90s and 00s) movements in the US and internationally. The beauty of a spokes council is that it allows large numbers of people to participate in directly democratic decision-making, united in their desire for accountable, transparent and horizontal relationships. It is called a spokes council because it is structured like the spokes of a wheel.

Typical Spokes Council



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- » Direct democracy
- » Non-hierarchy
- » Transparency
- » Accountability
- » Diversity
- » Anti-Oppression
- » Autonomy
- » Cooperation
- » Participation
- » Inclusion
- » Flexibility
- » Mutual Respect
- » Unleashing the revolutionary imagination!

» PROPOSAL IN DETAIL

The OWS Spokes Council will be comprised of Clusters of Working Groups and Caucuses.

WORKING GROUP CLUSTERS

- » A **Working Group** is defined as a group that is contributing tangible work to the occupation in a way that is collectively agreed to be essential and additive to the operation of the occupation as a whole.
 - » *Thematic Groups* are autonomous and do not have spokes in the Spokes Council, although they are encouraged to engage with the appropriate Working Groups to bring their ideas to the Spokes Council.
- » Each existing Working Group will submit a written charter to the Spokes Council including the following: a description of their mission and the work they are engaged in, where they meet, and how new people can get involved. A copy of their charter will be published on the NYCGA website.
- » Working Groups have the autonomy to make decisions relevant to their own needs, composition and operation.
- » Working Groups will be expected to join other Working Groups with similar missions to form a **Working Group Cluster**. Each Cluster will have one spoke person for each meeting of the Spokes Council.
- » New Working Groups present their proposed charters to the Spokes Council for approval and assistance in finding an appropriate Cluster.
- » Clusters are autonomous and are expected to check-in with each other between Spokes Councils.

CAUCUS CLUSTERS

- » A **Caucus** is a self-determining group of people that share a common experience of being systemically marginalized in our society based on their real or perceived race, gender identity, sexuality, age, or ability.
- » Each existing Caucus will submit a written charter to the Spokes Council including: a description of their mission, where they meet, and how new people can get involved. A copy of their charters will be published on the NYCGA website.
- » Caucuses have the autonomy to make decisions relevant to their own needs, composition and operation.
- » Caucuses will be encouraged to join other Caucuses with similar missions into a **Caucus Cluster**. Each Caucus Cluster will have a Spoke on the Spokes Council.
- » Caucuses have all the rights of a Working Group. In addition, they have the ability to halt a proposal they deem to have potentially disproportionately adverse consequences for their constituency, and allowed reasonable time to bring the issue to their Caucus for deliberation.
- » New Caucuses present their proposed charters to the Spokes Council for approval and assistance in finding an appropriate Cluster.
- » It is not the responsibility of a Caucus to educate others about oppression.

HOW IT WORKS

- » Before each Spokes Council, each Cluster selects a “*spoke*” to sit with the other “spokes” in a circle in the middle of the meeting space.
- » The spokes *are not representatives*, as they do not make decisions alone and are accountable to all the members of their cluster who are in attendance and seated directly behind them. Though they are the only individuals to speak at that meeting, when a proposal is made, they must confer with and reflect the collective sentiment of the attending members of their Cluster before speaking for them.
- » A Cluster can recall their spoke at any time if they are failing to adequately reflect the will of the Cluster.
- » Clusters will rotate their spoke from meeting to meeting, making space for marginalized voices to spoke more often.
- » Clusters in a Spokes Council participate as a unified voice. They deliberate and craft their proposals in their Cluster prior to bringing their proposal to the Spokes Council as a whole. This helps ensure that proposals are thoughtful and well crafted.
- » When deliberating on a proposal, a Cluster will bring their decision to the Spokes Council as a whole. This also means that if a member of a Cluster wants to block the Spokes Council from moving forward, they must first appeal to the wisdom of their Cluster, trusting that if their block is truly based on a serious ethical or safety concern, their Cluster will hear their wisdom and block the proposal. This relieves the Spoke Council from having to evaluate the merit of blocks and safeguards it from being obstructed by individuals that wish our movement harm.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly embodies the heart of our movement. It is a constantly evolving body that enables participation and horizontal process. The Spokes Council will not replace the GA. The GA will continue to make decisions that concern the relationship of the occupation as a whole to the broader movement.

PROPOSED SCHEDULE

- » In order to maximize access and participation, the Spokes Council will meet at 7PM Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.
- » The GA will continue to meet at 7pm on Saturdays and Sundays, when the broadest potential for movement building is possible.
- » Tuesday and Thursday nights will be open for cultural events, including speakers, discussions, music and other performances. Prior to these cultural events, there will be time for public announcements.

DECISIONS & DECISION-MAKING

- » The main function of the Spokes Council is coordination, in the form of working group report backs and agenda items.
- » Proposals for the Spokes Council must be relevant to other Clusters.
- » Proposals to the Spokes Council come fully formed from a Cluster. If an individual wants to make a proposal they must present the idea to a Cluster they’re actively involved in. That Cluster must go through a democratic process before the proposal can go to the Spokes Council.
- » Like the GA, Spokes Council decisions are made by modified consensus. We attempt to reach consensus and if consensus cannot be reached, and block cannot be addressed, a vote will be taken. To stop a proposal, one-tenth of all Clusters present must vote against it.
- » All decisions made in the Spokes Council (financial and otherwise) are completely transparent and posted on the NYCGA website.
- » The **four types of decisions** that the Spokes Council attend to are:
 1. Decisions related to the functioning and well-being of the occupation.
 2. All budgets and capital expenditures
 - » Budgets are submitted to the finance committee on weekly basis and presented to the Spokes Council in a consolidated form for approval
 3. Working Groups and Caucus charters and their affiliation with the Spokes Council
 4. All declarations that propose to represent OWS as a whole (principles of unity, demands, etc).
 - » These are brought first to the Spokes Council, as this is a more empowering space for caucuses to voice ethical concerns, and then they go to the GA for ratification.

OPEN ACCESS

- » The Spokes Council is open to all to witness, but to participate, one must be an active participant in a Working Group or Caucus.
- » The Occupiers Meeting will be given a spoke at the assembly for those camping but not involved in any formal Working Groups.
- » Meeting minutes will be transparent and posted on the NYCGA website through open-source technology.

INITIATION OF SPOKES COUNCIL

- » During the inaugural Spokes Council, all Working Groups and Caucuses will bring their charters for ratification by the Spokes Council.
- » This inaugural meeting will operate initially as a Spokes Council of un-ratified Working Groups/Caucuses and, through its own process, will move towards ending as a Spokes Council of ratified Clusters.
- » Working Groups will be encouraged to cluster with similar groups, such that the total number of Clusters do not exceed 20 now (and in the future will not exceed 30).
- » Groups that do not make this meeting will propose charters at subsequent meetings.
- » Additional process details will be worked out in subsequent Spokes Councils

****History of this Proposal** – This proposal has undergone many revisions, taking into account a wide range of concerns and amendments. It has been workshopped in the Facilitation Working Group, in the GA, in 2 large, public meetings, and 3 structure working group meetings.