

# Working Group & Caucus Spokes Council Proposal

Submitted by the Structure Working Group

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[A Living Document, 10/21/11]

## SUMMARY

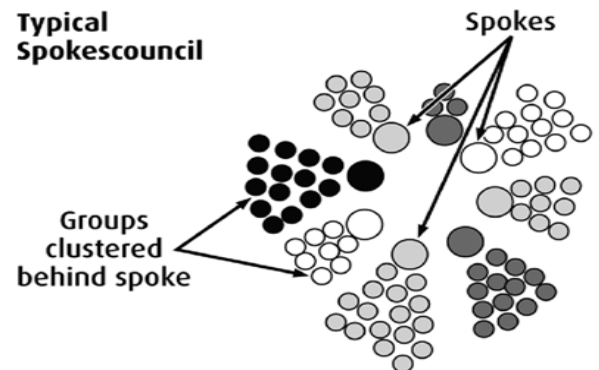
With the unbelievable success and growth of our movement over the past month, we find ourselves in need of a more transparent, accountable and functional structure for Working Groups and Caucuses to communicate, collaborate, and make decisions together, including holistic budgetary decisions. This structure 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 logistical work that benefits the occupation as a whole.
- » Working Groups have the autonomy to make decisions relevant to their own needs, composition and operation.
- » Each Working Group will submit a written charter to their Cluster including the following: their mission, the work they are engaged in, where and when they meet, and how people can join. A copy of their charter will be published on the NYC GA website.
- » Working Groups will join other Working Groups with similar missions to form Working Group Clusters. Each Cluster will have one spoke person for each meeting of the Spokes Council.
- » Clusters will present their proposed charter to the Spokes Council for approval.
- » Clusters will be autonomous within their area of operation and are expected to check-in with each other between Spokes Councils.

### THEMATIC GROUPS

- » **Thematic Groups** are autonomous and do not have clusters or spokes in the Spokes Council. If they wish to bring forward a proposal to the Spokes Council they may work with the appropriate Cluster to sponsor them. Thematic groups are welcome to bring proposals to the GA without sponsors.

### CAUCUS CLUSTERS

- » A **Caucus** is a self-determining group of people that share a common experience of being systemically marginalized in our society based (but not limited to) on their real or perceived race, gender identity, sexuality, age, or ability.
- » Caucuses have the autonomy to make decisions relevant to their own needs, composition and operation.
- » It is not the responsibility of a Caucus to educate others about oppression.
- » Each Caucus will submit a charter to their Cluster including: a description of their mission, where they meet, and how new people can get involved. A copy of their charter will be published on the NYC GA website.
- » Caucuses will join other Caucuses with similar experiences of systemic marginalization into Caucus Clusters. Each Caucus Cluster will have a Spoke on the Spokes Council.
- » Caucus Clusters will have all the powers of Working Group Clusters. In addition, they will have the ability to halt proposals they deem to have potentially disproportionately adverse consequences for their constituency. They will be allowed reasonable time to bring the issue to their Caucus Cluster for deliberation.
- » New Caucus Clusters will present their proposed charters to the Spokes Council for approval.
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## HOW IT WORKS

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- » Before each Spokes Council, each Cluster will consent to 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 sentiments of the attending members of their Cluster before speaking for them. If a Cluster cannot reach consensus, the spoke will reflect the diversity of sentiments in their Cluster.
- » 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 every meeting, which will make space for marginalized voices to be a spoke more often.
- » Working Groups and Caucuses will deliberate on their proposals within their Cluster prior to bringing their proposal to the Spokes Council as a whole. This helps ensure that proposals are thoughtful and well crafted.
- » If a Cluster as a whole cannot consent to a proposal, a Working Group or Caucus can put forth a proposal from just their group. The Cluster spoke will make clear whether the proposal is from the Cluster as a whole or a singular group.
- » 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.
- » Individuals that are in multiple Working Groups and Caucuses are free to sit with any Cluster they are a part of.

## OPEN ACCESS

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- » 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 Spokes Council will take place in a well-publicized indoor location with amplified sound so all can hear.
- » The Occupiers Meeting will be given a spoke at the assembly for those camping but not involved in any formal Working Groups.
- » All Spokes Councils will be broadcast over the Livestream (occupynyc) and meeting minutes and budget details will be completely transparent and posted on the NYCGA website through open-source technology.
- » The Spokes Council does not profess to speak for OWS as a whole. The GA will retain the ability to speak for OWS. Neither body will speak for other occupations nor the larger occupy movement.

## DECISIONS & DECISION-MAKING

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- » 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.
- » Like the GA, Spokes Council decisions are made by modified consensus. An attempt will be made 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 **three types of decisions** that the Spokes Council attend to are:
  1. Decisions related to coordination between Working Groups and Caucuses. (Decisions pertaining to the occupation as a whole will still go the GA.)
  2. Approval of all budgets and capital expenditures
    - » Budgets are submitted to the finance committee on weekly basis and presented to the Spokes Council for approval
  3. Decisions related to membership of Working Groups and Caucus charters and their affiliation with the Spokes Council.

## RELATIONSHIP TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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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 all decisions except budgetary and logistical decisions that are specific to the working groups.

## INITIATION OF SPOKES COUNCIL

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- » During the inaugural Spokes Council, all Working Group and Caucus Clusters 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 remains between 20 and 30.
- » Groups that do not make this meeting will propose charters at subsequent meetings.
- » Additional process details can be worked out in subsequent Spokes Councils
- » We will review the Spokes Council in the GA two weeks from the first Spokes Council, to reflect on how it's going and address concerns.

## PROPOSED SCHEDULE

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- » The GA will continue to meet at 7pm on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturdays and Sundays. The GA will remain the main decision making body for OWS as a whole.
- » In order to maximize access and participation, the Spokes Council will meet at 7PM Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

**\*\*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 3 GA discussions, in 2 large, public meetings, and 5 structure working group meetings.