

Working Group & Caucus Spokes Council Proposal

(A Living Document) -- Submitted by the Structure Working Group

SUMMARY

The General Assembly (GA) is the heart of our movement. It welcomes new people in, it gives them an immediate voice, and it introduces them to the power of direct democracy. The GA is an institution that can provide vital political discussion and diverse input on movement-wide decisions. It is also an institution that is unable to meet the day-to-day operational needs of the Working Groups and Caucuses.

PROBLEMS WE ARE FACING: (Identified in discussions in the GA, Working Groups, and Caucuses)

- **Lack of Participation:** There is little space within the GA for Working Groups and Caucuses to effectively communicate their needs, either to the broader movement or with each other, and so most of the groups doing the day-to-day work of the occupation no longer regularly attend.
- **Lack of Access:** The GA is a difficult place for new people to find a Working Group or Caucus they want to join.
- **Lack of Transparency:** There is a lack of transparency about the on-going activities of the Working Groups.
- **Lack of Accountability:** There is no accountability for the spending of finances granted by the GA.
- **Lack of Functionality:** Decisions take so long to be made in the GA that there is insufficient time to address the many needs of our Working Groups, and the Working Group members are often left feeling unsupported.
- **Less Informed Decision Making:** Attendance at the GA fluctuates from night to night, which makes it difficult to make well-informed, consistent, and strategic decisions.
- **Marginalization:** Some Caucus members do not feel that the GA is an empowering space for marginalized voices.
- **No Time for Visioning:** Broader political and community visions are rarely discussed in the GA because it is consistently bogged-down with logistical and financial decisions.
- **No Time for Building Trust and Solidarity:** The success of any movement is based on trust and solidarity. The GA does not currently offer its participants the time to get to know each other and build meaningful relationships.

In order to address these problems, while maintaining the non-hierarchical nature of OWS, we propose that, in addition to the GA, we create a directly democratic Spokes Council of Working Groups and Caucuses.

PROPOSAL:

AN OCCUPY WALL STREET SPOKES COUNCIL

- A Spokes Council is structured similar to the spokes of a wheel: It is designed to combine large group participation (like in the GA) with small group deliberation and consensus process.
- Each group selects a “*spoke*” to sit with the other “spokes” in a circle in the middle of the meeting space, with the rest of their group sitting right behind them.
- Spokes have no authority and are not decision-makers. They actively discuss all agenda items with all other members of their group who have joined them for the Spokes Council.
- Spokes are responsible for communicating the diversity of sentiments of their group to the rest of the spokes council.
- Spokes rotate at every meeting, and can be recalled by their group at any time.

WORKING GROUPS AND CAUCUSES

- *The OWS Spokes Council will be comprised of Working Groups and Caucuses*
- A **Working Group** is defined as a group that is contributing operational work that benefits Occupy Wall Street as a whole.
 - The Occupiers (i.e., people doing the essential work of holding the park through the night) can be considered a Working Group.
- A **Caucus** is a self-determining group of people that share a common experience of being systemically marginalized in society at large. This marginalization may be based on, but not limited to, their real or perceived race, gender identity, sexuality, age, or ability. It is not the responsibility of a Caucus to educate others about oppression.
- Working Groups must be open and accessible for people to join and can only exclude people for either repeatedly disrupting the group's process or behaving in a way that seriously violates the GA's Principles of Solidarity.
- During Spokes Councils, individuals in multiple groups are free to sit with any group that they are a part of and to move around at will.
- Groups doing work not focused on the operational logistics of OWS may partner with a Working Group to bring agenda items to the Spokes Council, and may also bring agenda items directly to the GA.

- The **Four types of decisions** that the Spokes Council attend to are:
 - 1) Decisions related to the logistical operation of Occupy Wall Street
 - 2) Approval of Occupy Wall Street budgets and expenditures
 - 3) The addition or subtraction of Working Groups and Caucuses to the Spokes Council
 - All Working Groups and Caucuses will be admitted to the Spokes Council that adhere to the above definitions of a Working Group or Caucus and that agree to abide by the Principles of Solidarity adopted (as a working draft) by the GA [available at <http://www.nycga.net/about/>]
 - The only reason a group may be asked to leave the Spokes Council is for either repeatedly disrupting the Spokes Council's process or for behaving in a way that seriously violates the GA's Principles of Solidarity
 - During the first Spokes Council, all groups will present a description of what they do and how people can become involved in their group. The rest of the groups in attendance will welcome them through the modified consensus process. New groups may continue to propose themselves to the Spokes Council on an on-going basis.
 - 4) Amendments to the functioning of the Spokes Council that do not alter the power of the GA
- Similar to the GA, Spokes Council decisions are made by modified consensus. An attempt will be made to reach consensus and if consensus cannot be reached, a vote will be taken. At least 10% of the group must vote against a proposal in order for it to be rejected.
- Both proposals and blocks to proposals are brought to the Spokes Council by groups as a whole
- Caucuses may delay any proposal that they think has potentially negative consequences for their caucus until the next Spokes Council in order to give them enough time to discuss the proposal with their caucus as a whole.

OPEN ACCESS AND TRANSPARENCY

- Anyone may attend a Spokes Council
- Anyone may participate in a Spokes Council by joining any Working Group or Caucus in the Spokes Council and/or becoming an Occupier (i.e., living in the park)
- The Spokes Council will take place in a well-publicized indoor location
- Amplification and signing will allow everyone to follow the discussion, participate through their Spoke, and ensure that their Spoke correctly communicates the sentiment(s) of their group
- Each Spokes Council will be broadcast over the Livestream (<http://www.livestream.com/occupynyc>)
- Budget details and complete minutes from each Spokes Council will be posted on the NYCGA.net website through open-source technology
- All decisions made in the Spokes Council are reported back to the GA with space for questions and concerns

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- The GA has the power to dissolve the Spokes Council at any time. Proposals to dissolve the Spokes Council must be announced in the GA and Spokes Council at least one week prior to a vote.
- The GA also has the power to amend the Principles of Solidarity, which is the ethical foundation of the Spokes Council and the grounds upon which Spokes Council groups are evaluated
- The GA will also continue to decide all issues related to the representation of OWS as a whole to the outside world (declarations, demands, etc.)
- The GA will continue to decide how OWS relates to the broader occupy movement

PROPOSED SCHEDULE

- The GA will meet at 7pm on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays
- The Spokes Council will meet at 7pm Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays

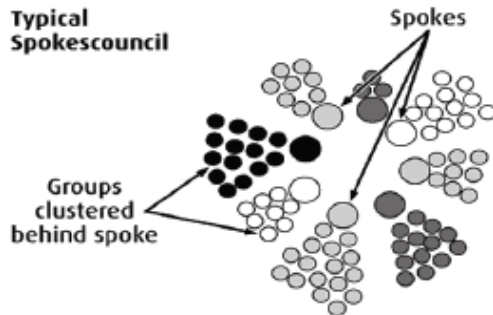
Background:

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE 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 the Women's Movement, the Anti-Nuclear Movement, and the Global Justice Movement in the US. It was also used effectively for years in China in the movement that grew out of Tiananmen Square.

WHAT DOES A SPOKES COUNCIL LOOK LIKE?

[Some members of the Arts & Culture working group volunteered to design a diagram of the spokes model because they were not fond of the diagram we had (the one below). When they finish that diagram we will replace the one below]



HISTORY OF THIS PROPOSAL

This proposal has undergone many revisions, taking into account a wide range of concerns. It has been work shopped in the Facilitation Working Group; the 4 GA discussions; 2 large public meetings; 5 Structure Working Group meetings; and 4 Spokes Council "teach-in" discussions.

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Members of the Structure Working Group will be available from 2-5PM on October 27th and 28th in the Atrium at 60 Wall Street to answer any questions or concerns. We are also available at owsstructure@gmail.com.