

## **OWS Structure Proposal**

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

### **SUMMARY**

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Since September 17<sup>th</sup> Occupy Wall Street (OWS) has grown and inspired occupations around the globe. The General Assembly (GA) is at the heart of this movement. It provides a forum for political discussion and a plurality of ideas. It is, however, struggling to meet the day-to-day operational needs of the Working Groups and Caucuses.

### **CHALLENGES:** (Identified in discussions in the GA, Working Groups, and Caucuses)

- **Access:** The GA is a difficult place for new people to find a Working Group or Caucus they want to join
- **Transparency:** There is a lack of transparency about the on-going activities of the Working Groups
- **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. Many of the groups doing the day-to-day work of the occupation no longer regularly attend the GA.
- **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
- **Decision Making:** Attendance at the GA fluctuates from night to night, which makes it difficult to make well-informed, consistent, and strategic decisions
- **Accountability:** There is no accountability for the spending of finances granted by the GA
- **Marginalization:** Some Caucus members do not feel that the GA is an empowering space for marginalized voices
- **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
- **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 General Assembly (GA), we create a directly democratic Spokes Council of Operations Groups and Caucuses.

## **PROPOSAL:**

### **DEFINITIONS**

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The Structure Working Group recommends the following definitions:

**Occupy Wall Street Operations Groups (OGs)** are groups that are contributing to the logistical and financial operations of Occupy Wall Street on a consistent basis. They are open and accessible for people to join and can only exclude people for either repeatedly disrupting the group's process or behaving in such a way that seriously violates the GA's Principles of Solidarity. Operations Groups must produce a written description of what they do and how people can get involved. The Occupiers (people living in Liberty Park) are defined as an Operations Group.

**Occupy Wall Street Movement Groups (MGs)** are groups that are contributing to the Occupy Wall Street movement. They are autonomous and may partner with Operations Groups on a project basis.

**Caucuses** are self-determining groups 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.

## THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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The GA will continue to have the power to make all decisions about

- The representation of OWS as a whole (declarations, principles, visions)
- The relationship between OWS and the Occupy Movement
- Financial decisions related to the Occupy Movement as a whole
- Dissolution of the Spokes Council with at least one week notice prior to the proposal. This notice must be given in both the GA and the Spokes Council.

## THE OCCUPY WALL STREET SPOKES COUNCIL

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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 any diversity of sentiments that may exist within their group to the rest of the spokes council
- Spokes rotate at every meeting, and can be recalled by their group at any time
- 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
- Movement Groups may partner with Operations Groups and/or Caucuses

## DECISIONS & DECISION-MAKING

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- 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 Operations 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 an Operations 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

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**

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- Anyone may attend a Spokes Council
- Anyone may participate in a Spokes Council by joining any Operations Group or Caucus in the Spokes Council and/or becoming an Occupier (i.e., living in Liberty Square)
- 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 FIRST SPOKES COUNCIL**

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During the first Spokes Council, all Operations Groups and Caucuses 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.

## **PROPOSED SCHEDULE**

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

# BACKGROUND:

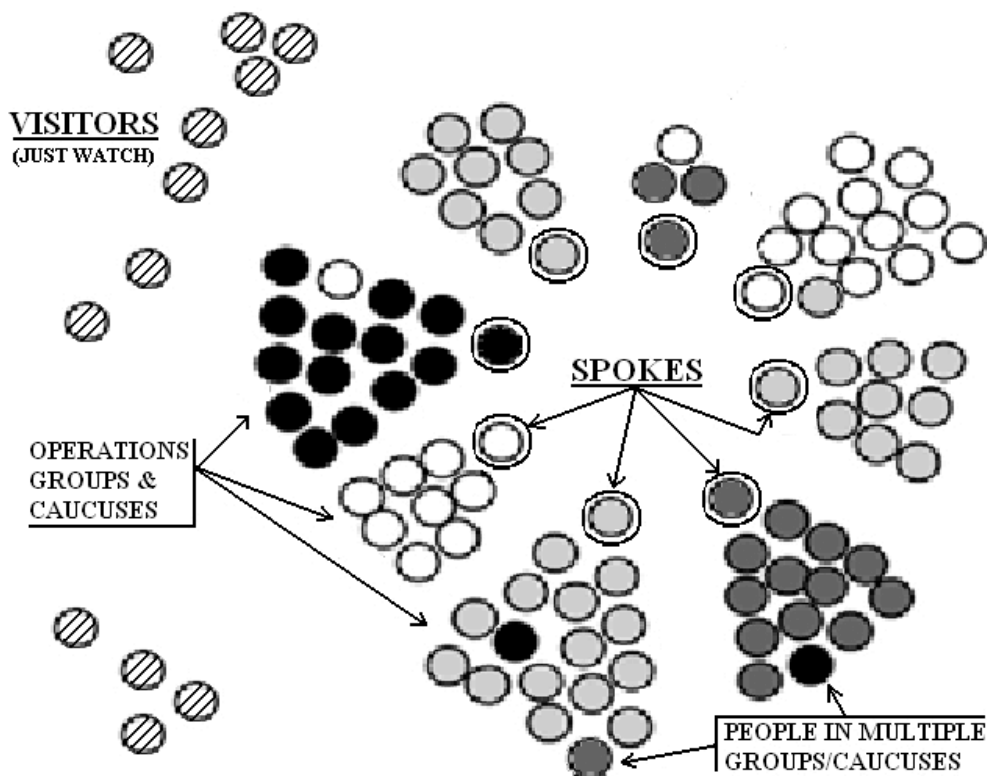
## BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SPOKES COUNCIL

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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?

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## HISTORY OF THIS PROPOSAL

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This proposal has undergone many revisions, taking into account a wide range of concerns. It has been workshopped 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

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Members of the Structure Working Group have been available from 2-5PM in the Atrium at 60 Wall Street to answer questions and concerns. This will continue on October 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>.

We are also available at [owsstructure@gmail.com](mailto:owsstructure@gmail.com).