

STRUCTURE AND PROCESS GUIDE TO OWS

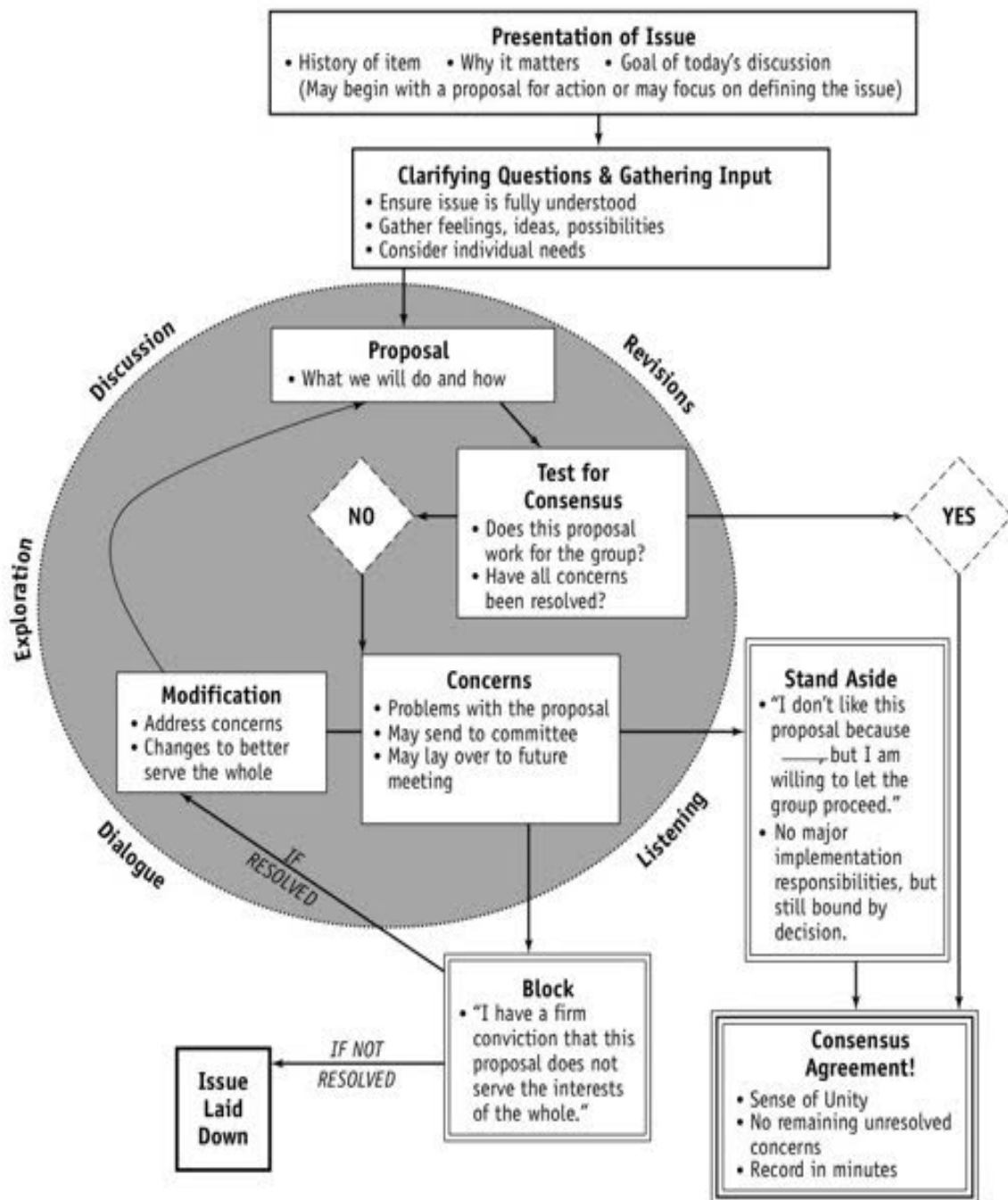


NYC GENERAL ASSEMBLY: HOW IT WORKS

The General Assembly is a gathering of people committed to making decisions based upon a collective agreement or “consensus.” There is no single leader or governing body of the General Assembly – everyone’s voice is equal. Anyone is free to propose an idea or express an opinion as part of the General Assembly. Each proposal follows the same basic format – an individual shares what is being proposed, why it is being proposed, and, if there is enough agreement, how it can be carried out. The Assembly will express its opinion for each proposal through a series of hand gestures (see next panel). If there is positive consensus for a proposal – meaning no outright opposition – then it is accepted and direct action begins. If there is not consensus, the responsible group or individual is asked to revise the proposal and submit again at the following General Assembly until a majority consensus is achieved.

NYC GENERAL ASSEMBLY | GROUPS Within the General Assembly, there are smaller gatherings known as “Working/ Thematic Groups” that focus on supporting

specific initiatives or topics relevant to the movement. These range from Food, Medical, and Legal Committees to Arts & Culture, Direct Action, Principles of Solidarity and many more. All groups are open to anyone interested in supporting. For a list and description of each group, check out: nycga.cc/groups/



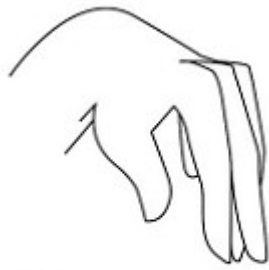
HAND GESTURES



Agree

Description: Hold your hands up, palm open, and fan your fingers back and forth.

Meaning: You agree with the proposal or like what you are hearing.



Disagree

Description: Hold your hand downward and fan your fingers back and forth.

Meaning: You disagree with the proposal or dislike what you are hearing.



Neutral

Description: Hold your hand flat and fan your fingers up and down.

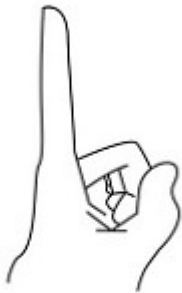
Meaning: You're taking a neutral stance on the proposal.



Clarification

Description: Curl your hand and fingers into a letter-C shape.

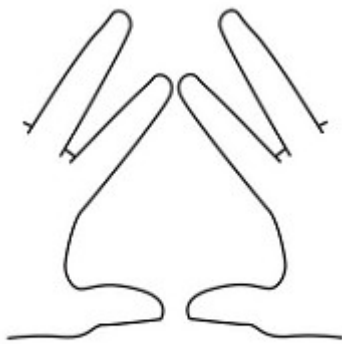
Meaning: You either have or need clarifying information.



Information

Description: Raise your index finger up.

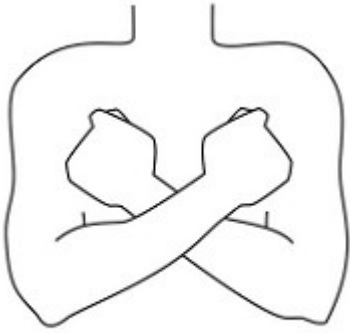
Meaning: You have information pertinent to the discussion (not for opinions).



Process

Description: Make a triangular shape with your hand by joining your index fingers and thumbs.

Meaning: Telling the group the process by which discussions are held is not being followed.



Description: Cross your arms in front of your chest to form an X.

Meaning: You have very strong moral or ethical reservations about the proposal and will consider leaving the group if it passes.

Block

What Is Consensus?

Consensus is a process for group decision-making. It is a democratic method by which an entire group of people can come to an agreement. The input and ideas of all participants are gathered and synthesized to arrive at a final decision acceptable to all. Through consensus, we are not only working to achieve better solutions, but also to promote the growth of community and trust.

Consensus vs. Voting

Voting is a means by which we choose one alternative from several. Consensus, on the other hand, is a process of synthesizing many diverse elements together. Voting assumes that people are always competitive and that agreement can only be reached through compromise. Consensus assumes that people are willing to agree with each other, and that in such an atmosphere, conflict and differences can result in creative and intelligent decisions. Another important assumption made in consensus is that the process requires everyone's participation, in speaking and in listening. No ideas are lost, each member's input is valued as part of the solution, and feelings are as important as facts in making a decision. It is possible for one person's insights or strongly held beliefs to sway the entire group, but participation should always remain equal.

PRINCIPLES OF SOLIDARITY

On September 17, 2011, people from all across the United States of America and the world came to protest the blatant injustices of our times perpetuated by the economic and political elites. On the 17th we as individuals rose up against political disenfranchisement and social and economic injustice. We spoke out, resisted, and successfully occupied Wall Street. Today, we proudly remain in Liberty Square constituting ourselves as autonomous political beings engaged in non-violent civil disobedience and building solidarity based on mutual respect, acceptance, and love. It is from these reclaimed grounds that we say to all Americans and to the world, Enough! How many crises does it take? We are the 99% and we have moved to reclaim our mortgaged future. Through a direct democratic process, we have come together as individuals and crafted these principles of solidarity, which are points of unity that include but are not limited to:

- Engaging in direct and transparent participatory democracy;
- Exercising personal and collective responsibility;
- Recognizing individuals' inherent privilege and the influence it has on all interactions;
- Empowering one another against all forms of oppression;
- Redefining how labor is valued;
- The sanctity of individual privacy;
- The belief that education is human right; and
- Making technologies, knowledge, and culture open to all to freely access, create, modify, and distribute. (amendment passed by consensus 2/9/2012)

We are daring to imagine a new socio-political and economic alternative that offers greater possibility of equality.

DECLARATION OF THE OCCUPATION OF NEW YORK CITY

As we gather together in solidarity to express a feeling of mass injustice, we must not lose sight of what brought us together. We write so that all people who feel wronged by the corporate forces of the world can know that we are your allies.

As one people, united, we acknowledge the reality: that the future of the human race requires the cooperation of its members; that our system must protect our rights, and upon corruption of that system, it is up to the individuals to protect their own rights, and those of their neighbors; that a democratic government derives its just power from the people, but corporations do not seek consent to extract wealth from the people and the Earth; and that no true democracy is attainable when the process is determined by economic power. We come to you at a time when corporations, which place profit over people, self-interest over justice, and oppression over equality, run our governments. We have peaceably assembled here, as is our right, to let these facts be known.

- They have taken our houses through an illegal foreclosure process, despite not having the original mortgage.
- They have taken bailouts from taxpayers with impunity, and continue to give Executives exorbitant bonuses.
- They have perpetuated inequality and discrimination in the workplace based on age, the color of one's skin, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation.
- They have poisoned the food supply through negligence, and undermined the farming system through monopolization.
- They have profited off of the torture, confinement, and cruel treatment of countless animals, and actively hide these practices.
- They have continuously sought to strip employees of the right to negotiate for better pay and safer working conditions.
- They have held students hostage with tens of thousands of dollars of debt on education, which is itself a human right.
- They have consistently outsourced labor and used that outsourcing as leverage to cut workers' healthcare and pay.
- They have influenced the courts to achieve the same rights as people, with none of the culpability or responsibility.
- They have spent millions of dollars on legal teams that look for ways to get them out of contracts in regards to health insurance.
- They have sold our privacy as a commodity.
- They have used the military and police force to prevent freedom of the press.
- They have deliberately declined to recall faulty products endangering lives in pursuit of profit.
- They determine economic policy, despite the catastrophic failures their policies have produced and continue to produce.
- They have donated large sums of money to politicians, who are responsible for regulating them.
- They continue to block alternate forms of energy to keep us dependent on oil.
- They continue to block generic forms of medicine that could save people's lives or provide relief in order to protect investments that have already turned a substantial profit.
- They have purposely covered up oil spills, accidents, faulty bookkeeping, and inactive ingredients in pursuit of profit.
- They purposefully keep people misinformed and fearful through their control of the media.
- They have accepted private contracts to murder prisoners even when presented with serious doubts about their guilt.
- They have perpetuated colonialism at home and abroad.
- They have participated in the torture and murder of innocent civilians overseas.
- They continue to create weapons of mass destruction in order to receive government contracts.*

To the people of the world,

We, the New York City General Assembly occupying Wall Street in Liberty Square, urge you to assert your power.

Exercise your right to peaceably assemble; occupy public space; create a process to address the problems we face, and generate solutions accessible to everyone.

To all communities that take action and form groups in the spirit of direct democracy, we offer support, documentation, and all of the resources at our disposal.

Join us and make your voices heard!

*These grievances are not all-inclusive.

STATEMENT OF AUTONOMY

Passed by the General Assembly at Occupy Wall Street. November 10, 2011 and passed revision by the General Assembly at Occupy Wall Street, March 3, 2012 Occupy Wall Street is a people's movement. It is party-less, leaderless, by the people and for the people. It is not a business, a political party, an advertising campaign or a brand. It is not for sale.

We welcome all, who, in good faith, petition for a redress of grievances through non-violence. We provide a forum for peaceful assembly of individuals to engage in participatory democracy. We welcome dissent.

Any statement or declaration not released through the General Assembly and made public online at www.nycga.net should be considered independent of Occupy Wall Street.

We wish to clarify that Occupy Wall Street is not and never has been affiliated with any established political party, candidate or organization. Our only affiliation is with the people.

The people who are working together to create this movement are its sole and mutual caretakers. If you have chosen to devote resources to building this movement, especially your time and labor, then it is yours.

Any organization is welcome to support us with the knowledge that doing so will mean questioning your own institutional frameworks of work and hierarchy and integrating our principles into your modes of action.

SPEAK WITH US, NOT FOR US.

Occupy Wall Street values collective resources, dignity, integrity and autonomy above money. We have not made endorsements. All donations are accepted anonymously and are transparently allocated via consensus by the General Assembly or the Operational Spokes Council.

We acknowledge the existence of professional activists who work to make our world a better place. If you are representing, or being compensated by an independent source while participating in our process, please disclose your affiliation at the outset. Those seeking to capitalize on this movement or undermine it by appropriating its message or symbols are not a part of Occupy Wall Street.

We stand in solidarity. We are Occupy Wall Street.

OCCUPY WALL STREET COMMUNITY AGREEMENT

Proposed to OWS Spokes Council by Safer Spaces Work Group revised as of 02.20.12; to be made available in multiple languages

I. Statement of Intention on Entering the Space

I enter each OWS space with a commitment to:

- mutual respect and support
- anti-oppression
- conflict resolution
- nonviolence
- direct democracy

I:

1. support the empowerment of each person to challenge the histories and structures of oppression that marginalize some, and divide us all . These may include racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, transphobia, xenophobia, religious discrimination, ageism, and ableism, among others.
2. commit to learning about different forms of oppression.
3. understand individual freedoms are not above our collective safety, well-being, and ability to function cooperatively; individual freedom without responsibility to the community is not the OWS way.
4. accept the decision of the community if I am not able to follow the agreements below.

II. AGREEMENTS

A. Commitment to Accessibility, Consent and Anti-Oppression

We will:

1. provide physical and language access to OWS spaces, and make resources equally available to all.
 2. not use physical or verbal violence or threats.
 3. get clear permission before touching other people or using their things.
 4. not use substances in our spaces that may attract the police and cause harm to our community.
 5. acknowledge that some people in our community are more vulnerable to police or hospital interaction*, and accept that calling the police or an ambulance is a decision to be made by the person most affected; this does not apply when someone is in critical condition or unable to give permission.
 6. respect each person's expressed name and identities and their choice of whether to share that information. We will do our best not to make assumptions about identity—race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, abilities, or class, among others—based on a person's appearance.
 7. be aware of how prejudice and structures of oppression affect our speech and actions, including the ways power and privilege are related to race, gender, physical ability, immigration status, wealth, and/or sexuality, among other identities.
 8. show compassion and respect to our comrades, especially those who have experienced trauma, abuse, or oppression. We will not shout people down, dismiss oppression, or engage in other dominating or aggressive behavior.
 9. respect diverse styles of speaking, learning, and interacting that may not align with the dominant culture and make space for all to communicate.
 10. acknowledge that each person comes to our space with different experiences. So while we may not intend to hurt other people by our words or actions, this can still happen. We agree that it's an act of solidarity to listen and not reply right away when a person or group of people say they feel oppressed by our words or actions.
 11. not tolerate police informants who intend to undermine OWS goals, and we will not accuse others of informing or otherwise working for law enforcement agencies to undermine OWS without concrete evidence.
- * because of race, documentation status, immigration status, gender, economic situation, age, criminal justice or medical history, and experience of police violence.

B. Commitment to Conflict Resolution & Accountability

We will:

1. do our best to hold ourselves and each other accountable to these agreements.
2. express concerns about violations based on how they affect us or others, without judgment of intent.
3. participate in a conflict resolution process when asked to by the community, and develop transformative ways to address harm.
4. be guided by decisions of the person harmed while providing all involved the chance to change the cycles of abuse and violence.
5. agree that sometimes a situation is important enough to stop a meeting immediately to address concerns.
6. make every effort to understand and be open as a community to change.

7. put in place an OWS de-escalation process if anyone disrespects these agreements. We may choose to remove the person(s) from the meeting or other OWS space until the harm has been addressed.
8. remove people who have committed sexual violence or abuse and let the survivor decide the conditions for their return. We understand that they may not be able to return.
9. understand that people who have committed harm in or outside OWS that prevents the participation of others may need to leave until the harm has been addressed.
10. work to coordinate with organizations chosen by our community to assist individuals who have committed abuse or violence, or those who want to overcome addiction.
11. begin each meeting with a reminder of these agreements

Working Group & Caucus Spokes Council Proposal

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

SUMMARY

The 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 we cannot afford to lose and that we should put real energy into making a lot more meaningful and impactful. It is also an institution that is not able 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 in the GA for Working Groups and Caucuses to effectively communicate their needs either the broader movement or with each other, and so most of the groups doing most of the day-to-day work of the occupation are no longer showing up.
- **Lack of Access:** It is very difficult for new people looking to join a Working Group or Caucus to find them at the GA.
- **Lack of Transparency:** There is a lack of transparency about the on-going activities of the Working Groups.
- **Lack of Accountability:** There is no clear mechanism for accountability about how finances granted by the GA are actually spent.
- **Lack of Functionality:** Decisions take so long to be made in the GA, that there is not enough time to address all the many needs of our Working Groups, and they 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:** Many in Causes 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 General Assembly (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 like 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 the 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 (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 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 they are a part of and to move around at will.
- Groups that are doing work that is not focused on the operational logistics of OWS,

can partner with a Working Group to bring agenda items to the Spokes Council and can bring agenda items directly to the GA.

DECISIONS & DECISION-MAKING

- 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
 - a) 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/>].
 - b) The only reason a group can 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.
 - c) During the first Spokes Council, all groups will present a description of what they do and how people can get involved in their group. The rest of the groups in attendance will welcome them through the modified consensus process. New groups can 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.
- 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, a vote will be taken. At least 10% of the group must vote to reject a proposal.
- Both proposals and blocks to proposals are brought to the Spokes Council by groups as a whole.
- Caucuses may delay until the next Spokes Council any proposal that they think has potentially negative consequences for their caucus, to give them time to discuss the proposal with their caucus as a whole.

OPEN ACCESS AND TRANSPARENCY

- Anyone can attend a Spokes Council.
- Anyone can participate in a Spokes Council by joining any Working Group or Caucus in the Spokes Council and/or becoming an Occupier (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 (occupynyc).
- Budget details and complete minutes from each Spokes Council will be posted on the NYCGA website through open-source technology.
- All decisions made in the Spokes Council are reported back to the GA with space for questions and concerns.
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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...)
- The GA will continue to decide how OWS related to the broader occupy movement.

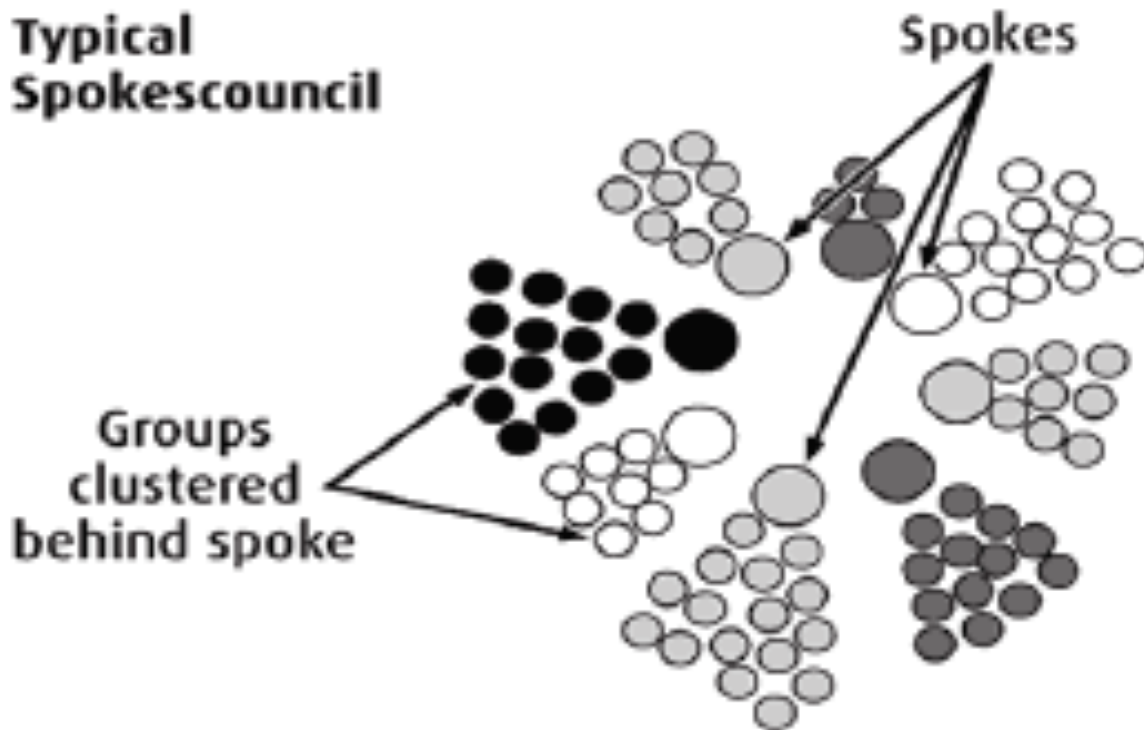
PROPOSED SCHEDULE

- The GA will meet at 7pm on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturdays and Sundays.
- The Spokes Council will meet at 7pm Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

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 Global Justice Movement in the US and internationally. 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?



HISTORY OF THIS PROPOSAL

This proposal has undergone many revisions, taking into account a wide range of concerns. It has been workshopped in the Facilitation Working Group, in the 4 GA discussions, in 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 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.