

Resources for Small Town Occupations



OCCUPY



Developed by the Rural Organizing Project
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Resources for Occupying Small Town Oregon

What is the Activity? The Rural Organizing Project has heard the call from human dignity groups and small town occupiers from across the state: you want tools and resources to make the most of this exciting moment! That is why we have developed **Resources for Small Town Occupations**: tools developed for rural and small town communities to keep the occupy movement alive and vibrant in Oregon!

Why this Activity? The Occupy movement is taking the country by storm because our democracy has failed us. The people's voice is buried under campaign contributions, corporate personhood and the grip Wall Street has on Salem and DC. Fueled by the growing inequity in political power the 99% face in the forms of deportation, foreclosures and unemployment, people are harnessing the power of **bold action** coupled with **democratic decision-making**.

This moment isn't just exciting, **its effects are being felt at the core of the banking regime**. Bank of America went from announcing a new \$5 monthly debit card fee, to reeling under the pressure from the media and political outcry leveraged by the Occupy movement. Now, Chase and Wells Fargo, two of Bank of America's biggest consumer banking competitors, have promised not to levy debit card fees on customers, and Bank of America had no choice but to follow suit. **Credit unions across the state are reporting that they are seeing three times more new sign-ups than normal**.

As far as we can tell, Oregon has four times more Occupy events than any other state in the country! Dozens of rural and small town Oregon communities are organizing Occupations that are bringing new and aspiring activists and organizers out of the woodwork, hungry for direct action, political strategizing and real change. **Rural Oregon is ripe with opportunity**.

This movement is about creating conversations that build community, direct action and results. It is still an experiment, but it is a real opportunity to build our own democratic spaces, develop horizontal leadership and address the holes in our social safety nets **while we push for a real democratic government**.

Occupy Wall Street uses General Assemblies and Spokescouncils to discuss and determine their direction. What can we learn from these models of decision-making? How can we bring these models into our organizing to engage people who are eager to help make change?

We need to hold actions, demonstrations and occupations but **we also need to build trust with the rest of the 99% and create space for their stories to be told**. If the public is not with us, we cannot win. Outreach and deeper engagement with the 99% who may not show up to our actions is essential. Bold action supported **by innovative community outreach methods** brings our neighbors into the conversation.

New people are engaging in this moment using **social media to find each other and organize**. Let's learn from this and use these systems to enhance our person-to-person organizing strategies.

Let's ensure that this movement and our organizing is sustainable. Let's push for new and effective ways of staying relevant and innovative. Most importantly, **let's have some fun!**

STEPS TO COMPLETE THIS ACTIVITY

The resources and links discussed below are all available in this kit!

1. Reach out to the 99% in your community:

Start a conversation about the Occupy movement with neighbors, friends and community members. Tools include:

- A sample Op-Ed
- A sample Letter to the Editor: a neighbor-to-neighbor approach to talking about the Occupy movement
- A customizable flyer describing the Occupy movement for your community
- Hold a teach-in or roundtable conversation

Clatsop Community College held a roundtable on the Occupy Wall Street Movement that featured several local professors and invited the public. Oregon State University's Peace Studies Department held a teach-in leading up to the student walk-out and Occupation yesterday (October 31st). Contact ROP for support in putting together a local teach-in or Roundtable that gives our communities the opportunity to discuss for themselves what the Occupy movement is about.

2. Consider why and how to hold a People's General Assembly:

People's General Assemblies are real democracy in action. This movement has grown because it is about giving everyone a voice, democratic participation and consensus-based decision making. A People's General Assembly is a structure that creates space for everyone to be a part of shaping the direction of our actions and organizing. This overview covers why and how to hold a People's General Assembly in your community, and strategies for adapting the model to small town communities.

3. Use innovative community outreach methods:

Occupy events across the country connected with new activists through online social media. People interested in getting involved are using social media to find each other. Don't get left behind! Incorporate social media like Facebook and Twitter into your organizing now! Is social media new to you? Contact Jessica@rop.org for support in getting started.

- a. Post your Occupy event on OccupyTogether.org and Meetup.com
- b. Many small town Oregon Occupy events started by creating a Facebook group. Start your Facebook group and connect with us at Occupy Rural Oregon!
- c. Share your successes! Share videos on YouTube and photos on flickr!
- d. Feeling advanced? Try Twitter and Livestream!

4. Connect with other rural and small town occupations across Oregon. Share strategies, tools, ideas and more!

- a. Contact ROP to join dozens of small town communities on the Occupy Rural Oregon email listserve, a discussion-based listserve for ideas, strategies and more. Email Jessica@rop.org to join!
- b. Use the Occupy Rural Oregon Facebook page to share events, articles and ideas.
- c. By connecting in with other occupations, we are sharing resources and ideas to keep the momentum going, including sharing Move Your Money materials, tying in existing campaigns like Foreclose on Walden, and strategizing on some next steps together. Join the conversation today!

KITCHEN TABLE ACTIVISM

November 2011 Activity

Background: *Kitchen Table Activism (KTA) is a monthly project of the Rural Organizing Project. The theory is that basic steps can lead to powerful collective results as local groups gather to complete the same action throughout the state. ROP works to keep the tasks achievable so that groups with other projects or groups with limited immediate energy can still manage to complete the KTA each month.*

Sample Opinion Article: *Reclaiming the conversation; revisioning democratic society*

A lot of people are asking, “what is the Occupy Wall Street Movement really about?” It is about ordinary folks coming together to learn how to rebuild a democracy that responds to the needs and direction of the people as a whole.

For years people have watched in dismay as they tried to live and work honestly and humbly in the ways they were taught would bring them a good and dignified life, only to see it taken away. Countless people in rural and small town Oregon are deeply frustrated about the loss of jobs and the suffering that brings, about widening and crushing inequality in our state and nation, losing their life savings to wild Wall Street schemes, then losing tax dollars to Wall Street bail-outs and their homes to foreclosure by the same banking regime. Even many who obtained a college education with its promise of solid opportunities can no longer find decent employment. Now, incomes reduced or disappeared, savings and assets depleted, vast swaths of ordinary people find themselves buried under huge mounds of debt to the very banks that caused this deep and long recession.

People turned to their elected representatives, but watched in dismay at the outrageous spectacles of a Congress unable or unwilling get anything at all done to help anyone but the already rich and powerful. The dominant conversation from the political classes and major media focused almost exclusively on pushing austerity and sacrifice on ordinary people, while creating even more prosperity for Wall Street, huge corporations and the wealthiest people. As the stock market, corporate profits, Wall Street bonuses, and the income and riches of the top 1% skyrocketed, the quality of most people’s lives plummeted.

The Occupy movements all over the United States and the world, including rural and small town Oregon, are first and foremost about changing the conversation. This is where we can hear the crescendo of voices refusing to allow their needs and struggles to go unheeded even one more day. Where the conversations come from We The People, not the centers of money power.

Visit an Occupy Wall Street camp or meeting and you will hear the conversations about receiving far too little for our hard work, about our diminishing common resources being increasingly diverted to pad the obscene wealth of the very few; about how decent employment is no longer considered the norm, but a privilege bestowed by the rich to be cut or shipped away at any moment to increase profits. Conversations about basic health and dental care being unaffordable for most families; of collapsing local and state budgets where the poor pay more of their income in taxes and fees than the wealthy. Conversations about total neglect for the neediest among us, whose very lives depend on the type of public assistance this nation was once proud to provide. Conversations about roads and bridges crumbling, schools decaying physically and pedagogically, social safety nets the people paid to

build being raided for private profit. Officials who promised to look after the people's interests looking solely after the interests of their biggest donors.

The Occupy Wall Street Movement is about lifting up the vast majority of us who have been excluded from the dominant conversation about fairness and basic human dignity in our society. Movements have always amplified voices – and occupy movements will amplify a conversation long awaited: imagining a society that serves the needs of all of its people.

In addition to changing the subject of conversation, Occupy assemblies are changing how conversations occur and decisions are made. The conversation invites all people to add the voice of their experience. All are allowed to speak and all are respected. Decisions are made by the group through a process of consensus that requires deep engagement and a dedication to the best interests of all members beyond simply trying to push personal agendas or goals.

There is tremendous power in these occupy conversations. As people talk about the ways their lives are being harmed, offer their suggestions for action, and really feel heard. People begin to rediscover themselves and the fact that they are not alone. They become empowered to believe they can spur positive and lasting change in our society despite all they have been told and all the ways they have been put down and blocked out of the centers of power.

The Occupy movement invites us all to take another small bite into a political and economic system that seems so impenetrable. They invite each of us to build a deeper understanding of the sources and the impacts of our neighborhood crises. They invite to us to go to public spaces, take up residence and, finally, talk to each other. The conversations of occupying communities will ultimately make for more powerful democratic neighborhoods and institutions.

The people are peaceably assembling in the parks, on the streets, and in occupied public spaces throughout Oregon and standing up for a principle not long ago well accepted, but lately cast by the dominant messengers in our society as tool of radicalism: They stand for the principle that what almost every one wants and needs should matter in a democracy.

Sample Letter to the Editor:

Reclaiming the conversation; revisioning democratic society

What is the Occupy Wall Street Movement? It is about ordinary folks coming together to learn how to rebuild a democracy that responds to the needs and direction of the people as a whole.

For years people have tried to live and work honestly and humbly in the ways they were taught would bring them a good and dignified life, only to see it taken away. Countless people in rural and small town Oregon have lost their life savings to Wall Street schemes, tax dollars to Wall Street bail-outs, and homes to foreclosure by the same banking regime. People turned to their elected representatives, but watched in exasperation as the dominant conversation pushed sacrifice by ordinary people while the riches of the top 1% skyrocketed.

The Occupy movements across the world, including rural Oregon, are about changing the conversation. The conversations come from We The People, not the centers of money power. The Occupy Wall Street Movement seeks to lift up the majority of us who have been excluded from the dominant conversation about fairness and basic human dignity in our society.

The Occupy movement invites us all to take another small bite into a political and economic system that seems impenetrable. They invite us to build a deeper understanding of the sources and impacts of our neighborhood crises. They invite us to go to public spaces and talk to each other. These conversations will make for more powerful democratic neighborhoods and institutions.

The people are peaceably assembling in the parks and occupied public spaces throughout Oregon to stand up for a principle well accepted, but cast by the dominant messengers in our society as a catchphrase of radicalism; they stand for the principle that what the vast majority of the people want and need should matter in a democracy.



What is Occupy Wall Street? Reclaiming Our Democracy!

It's on the news and all over the internet, but what is the Occupy Wall Street Movement about?

For countless people in our rural and small town communities in Oregon, there is a deep frustration about inequality in our nation;

It feels like our votes don't matter,
Our voices don't reach Salem, much less D.C.,
AND the rich are getting richer while we fall on hard times.

People all over Oregon are disillusioned with **OUR** elected officials and **OUR** economy.

People in our neighborhood are being seriously harmed by:

Getting too little for our hard work
Dwindling resources going to sustain the wealth of the 1%
Basic health care being beyond our reach
Taxes are unfairly collected at higher percentages from the poor than from the wealthy
Years of family investments and savings lost to banks while our tax dollars bail them out.

We watch as roads and bridges crumble, schools decay, and social safety nets we paid to assemble are raided for private profit. We vote for officials who promised to look after our needs but only pursued the interests of their biggest donors.

Fed up with all of this? **We are too!**

The 1,500 Occupy events taking place across the country are the only public place where these conversations are happening. The Occupy movements across the world, including rural Oregon, are about **changing the conversations everyone is having.**

The Occupy Movement wants to develop a society that works for the 99% of Americans, not just the wealthiest 1%. The conversations come from We The People, not the centers of money and power.

The Occupy Movement has an invitation for each of us:

- Take a bite into our seemingly impenetrable political-economic system
- Build a deeper understanding of the sources and the impacts of our neighborhood crises
- Name it: Wall Street funnels wealth to the top 1% while leaving the rest of us behind.

What is the occupy movement trying to do?

The Occupy Movement is bringing the voices of the people directly to Wall Street and to the government. We are not asking an organization or a political party what to demand, whom to confront and to whom to grant immunity. We are uniting a people to insist on representation in our own government.

We believe that what the vast majority of the people want and need should matter in a democracy.

Small Town Guide to People's General Assemblies

Democracy in Action!

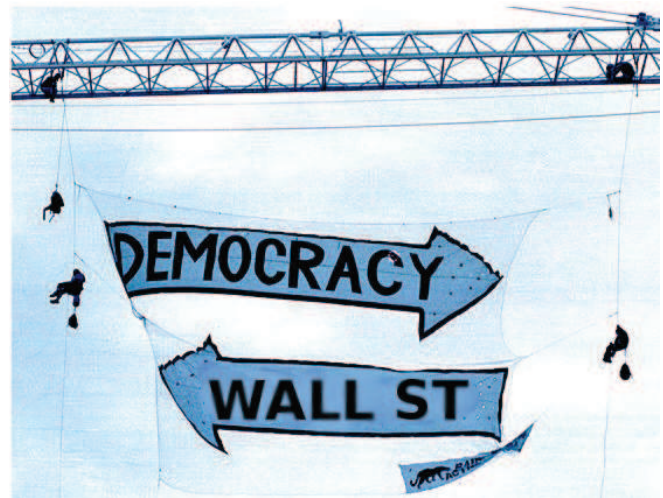
This guide was prepared for the Rural Organizing Project by Chris Borte. Chris is a proud father of two and learned everything he knows about rural organizing from his spouse Amy Dudley. He helped initiate the direct action to shut down the WTO in 1999 and recently worked with creating democracy to organize the People's Movement Assembly in Portland and the Movement Building Conversation Series. For over 6 years he has been a long time friend, great "thinker" and volunteer with the Rural Organizing Project.

"This is what democracy looks like!"

The first time I heard those words was at a moment very much like today. Democrat in the white house, people rising up democratically opposing massive financial interests, and when no one would predict success... we shut down the WTO!

The similarities do not end there: consensus, people's mic, non-violent direct action and the re-emergence of Spokescouncils. What ROPers may not know is that the origin one of the most common chants of the occupy movement began in the Key Lime cluster that our own Cara Shufelt (ROP Director) helped organize.

It was an amazingly well planned intersection occupation that incorporated spoken word and, if you can believe it, a mural with graffiti writers at the center. The intersection was held using a consensus process in the street with over 200 strong. One of the graffiti writers wrote on the mural for all to see, "This is What Democracy Looks Like" and the spoken word took that phrase, repeated it and gave it the cadence that you hear today around the world.



General Assemblies, People's Movement Assemblies, and Spokescouncils: A Brief History

The occupations spreading like a global prairie fire did not start in a vacuum. The **General Assembly** model that forms the center of leadership at Occupy Wall Street comes from the May 15 democratic uprising in Spain, which was inspired by democratic uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia. The General Assembly process was designed for the hundreds to thousands at gatherings where there is no pretense of every voice being heard, but aims to create space for masses to engage in collective decision making.

There have been several other approaches tried in the last decade to create a movement infrastructure for mass, democratic decision making. In 2010, ROP participated in one of the nearly 100 **People's Movement Assemblies (PMAs)** that took place across the country in coordination with the US Social Forum in Detroit. PMAs passed resolutions and sent them onto Detroit.

Spokescouncils were used in Seattle in 1999 as the decision making body for the direct actions that led to the shutdown of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Prior to WTO organizing, Spokescouncils were used to stop the construction of over 60 nuclear power plants across the United

States. This model organizes people into groups and each group sends a representative to the Spokescouncil Meeting.

General Assemblies, People's Movement Assemblies and Spokescouncils have differences, but they are more alike than they are different. They all use consensus and all try to address the question of trying to scale small group direct democracy to large groups. What sets them apart from other processes is that they value the concerns, the participation and the leadership of everyone. **True horizontal leadership and true democratic practice.** With these processes, we are all leaders that shape the direction of our movement and organizing. What gives the occupy movement power is that when we make decisions and take action together we are FAR stronger than when we merely follow.

Why Hold a People's General Assembly in Your Town?

Prepare for a shift in momentum: New leaders and activists are popping out of the woodwork right now, hungry to be engaged in this growing movement. Human dignity groups are finding new friends, partnering with new people and developing new relationships. As our initial actions wind down, people will be hungry to figure out next steps. They are hungry to ***be a part of the process.*** A People's General Assembly is a chance to sincerely engage folks in deciding what is next, rather than all of us waiting around to be told what to do. Now is when new people will show up eager to be a part of the process. **Now is the moment to plan for your People's General Assembly.**

Engage new leaders: If you are a leader in your town, you may not be aware of what it feels like on the outside. People may agree with our ideas, but not know how to find our meetings, they may not speak our activist jargon or they may not yet have the confidence to speak up. Large-scale public decision making is powerful because it provides an opportunity to critically engage EVERYONE who comes out. We try to be engaging with all our events, **but there is something unique about being immediately part of the leadership.** This is a less-recognized fuel that has fed the Occupy flame.

Small Town Guide to People's General Assemblies: Tips for Holding a People's General Assembly in Your Community!

Quick and Dirty Consensus

Democratic meeting process (whether a general assembly, a People's Movement Assembly or a Spokescouncil) uses consensus decision making. If you're not familiar with consensus, it's basically a collaborative rather than competitive decision making process that draws on the concerns and best ideas of the whole group. It is horizontal decision making.

If you are reading this, and you have to facilitate a consensus meeting, and you are not sure about what to do, remember your job is to help the group hear each other and work together to come to agreement. When you hear that the group is nearing agreement, here are the key phrases: **"Are there any concerns with this proposal?"** And, after waiting an appropriate amount of time, **"Hearing none, we have reached consensus!"**

If concerns are raised, work together to resolve them. It is usually easier than you think. Since this is happening right now, try to find some experienced consensus facilitators lurking around. If you cannot find any, we may be able to help. At the end of this document we provide some additional resources on consensus.

Large Group Decision Making

In a standard consensus training, you may not find guidance for large groups. Here are a few tips that may help the decision making process:

- **Facilitation** - Have at least one backup facilitator. They can watch the mood of the group, step aside with an upset individual, trade off or simply offer support. It would be good to hold at least one facilitation training to share the load and rotate this important role.
- **Stack Keeper** - have someone other than the facilitator keep a stack, which is a list of people in queue to speak. A progressive stack is where you call on people who have not spoken or who are marginalized.
- **Scribe** - a dedicated scribe to write out ideas on an easel can help when trying to decide on a proposal.
- **Send it to committee** - Rather exhausting everyone, if it looks like you are not nearing consensus after an hour of discussion, have a small group work on it and bring a new proposal to the next meeting.
- **Handsignals** - Handsignals common to consensus are critical for large meetings. Again do not worry about using the "wrong" hand signals. The ones used in NY are great examples and are linked to below.
- **Step Up, Step Back** - If you have a few individuals dominating the conversation, remind everyone that we want to hear from everyone. If you have already spoken a lot, please try to make space for others. If you have not spoken yet, we would like to hear from you.
- **Amplification** - Get a PA system if you can. The People's Mic (or the Human Mic) is great when the City requires a sound permit and you do not want to risk breaking the law. Use the People's Mic to rev up a crowd or when you want, but do not use it for everything. It is not required.

- **Go easy on yourself** - A big public meeting ain't easy, no matter how experienced you are.

Creating Space for Everyone: Let's Do the Math...

Whether in the streets of Seattle in 1999, in front of Wall Street in 2011 or in the HDGs of rural OR, how we make decisions together is at the crux of what keeps us engaged as individuals and growing as a movement. There are a couple of keys to maximizing democratic decision making to keep the newly ignited Occupy movement aflame.

What is hard about large-scale decision making is that even though it allows for more participation than hearing speeches, it does not solve the problem of participation. Let's do some math. When you are thinking about large meetings it is important to remember:

$$(\text{meeting length}) / (\text{number of participants}) = (\text{minutes of talk time per participant})$$

Here's a helpful table:

Number of participants	5	10	15	25
Talk time in a 2hr meeting	24	12	8	5

If you have a two-hour mass meeting with 120 participants, the most that anyone would be equitably able to speak, respond and discuss would be one minute. That can work okay in a crisis, but once the crisis has passed, people that have little opportunity to be heard will either feel frustrated, or feel unnecessary and leave.

One way to maximize participation is to **break large groups into small groups**. Every occupation instinctively uses small groups to decide things from food to security to media rather than try to decide everything, including every menu item at the General Assembly. In fact, just last week the New York City General Assembly introduced a proposal to modify their process to use a Spokescouncil structure with each working group sending a "spoke" to the General Assembly.

To take that innovation of Spokescouncils further, at the 2010 PMA in Portland we attempted to break down the barriers that make it hard for affinity groups, large non-profits, unions, religious groups or human dignity groups from making movement decisions together democratically. Could this be used as a new model for movement building? For actual movement decision making?

Advancing Democracy in Rural Oregon

What could happen if we brought together dozens of people in our town to discuss the next steps for our local Occupy and/or human dignity group organizing? How many new leaders might we find and bring in? What if each community that has an Occupation in rural Oregon held a General Assembly and passed a resolution in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street? Imagine what it would feel like for each of our communities to do this and the message we would be sending on our ability to organize. What if we broke ground on a model that rural people in other states could use? What if? After what we have seen this October, you can no longer say it cannot be done.

With these efforts at democratic process, we are making space for new movement infrastructure. A new kind of movement. A movement that sincerely engages many people. A movement that asks people not to hope and wait on the sidelines for instruction, but to join the conversation now, be a part of the decision making and help shape the direction of our movement, our local organizing and our human dignity work. If we get good at making decisions together, we can engage many people and we will win.

Since I opened with similarities between today and 1999, before I close I would like to remind all of us of another similarity between the antiglobalization movement and this movement: it was

criticized for being mostly white. [Do not make the same mistakes today that were made then.](#) Do not ignore or deny the criticism; rather, face it honestly and humbly. Yes, white people I am talking to you. Do not get paralyzed with fear into inaction. But also do not overreact and split white people into a group who “don’t get it” and another who become self-righteous white allies. For example of what we did right, a few participants in the Key Lime Cluster in 1999 started the [Catalyst Project](#), which hands-down is the clearest response white veterans of the anti-globalization have to white supremacy within the movement. Guess who Catalyst holds up when they want to give examples of white people doing good racial justice organizing? You. ROP’s work in solidarity with rural Latino communities is something you should all be proud of. Real white allies know that it ain’t democracy until EVERYONE is at the table. **Together, we are the 99%.**

Additional Resources

Simple Democratic Process - <http://pma.creatingdemocracy.org/get-involved/decision-making-process>

- (1 page) used for the 2010 Portland PMA

A Short Guide to Consensus Decision Making from the occupytogether.org website -

<http://howtocamp.takethesquare.net/2011/10/24/a-short-guide-to-consensus-decision-making/>

Guide to Hand Signals from NYC’s GA - <http://nycga.cc/resources/general-assembly-guide/>

The People’s Mic at Occupy Wall Street (YouTube video) -

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=knhnpUgdi_o

Occupy Together General Assembly Resources - <http://www.howtooccupy.org/>

People’s Movement Assembly Organizing Kit - <http://peoplesmovementassembly.org/resources>

Social Media Resources for Small Town Occupations

The Occupy movement exists because of the power of social media. For two weeks, corporate media ignored Occupy Wall Street until word of their bold organizing and the brutality of the NYPD was spread on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Even FOX News had no choice but to report the successes of Occupy Wall Street! Most importantly, social media is how people are sharing strategies, tactics and resources to effectively Occupy as a movement.

Rural Oregonians have posted Occupy events for their small towns on Facebook and discovered the 99% in their communities. New activists are finding long-time human dignity leaders and vice versa. Many have had the critical mass to begin seriously organizing! Others have used social media to get media coverage, to alert supporters of last-minute or surprise actions, and to keep everyone updated quickly.

Get started using social media now! New and want some support? Contact ROP at jessica@rop.org!

Create a Facebook Page for your Occupy group!

- Tutorial: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/60987449/New-Pages-Manual-2>
- Don't forget to "Like" Occupy Rural Oregon!

Check out all of the events on OccupyTogether, and add yours!

- <http://www.meetup.com/occupytogether>

Learn how to make, edit, and upload videos on YouTube:

- Tutorial: http://www.youtube.com/t/creators_corner

Share your photos using Flickr

- Tutorial: <http://www.flickr.com/tour/#section=welcome>

Use Twitter to keep your group members, allies, and fans updated:

- Tutorial: <http://support.twitter.com/groups/31-twitter-basics/topics/104-welcome-to-twitter-support/articles/215585-twitter-101-how-should-i-get-started-using-twitter>
- Don't forget to use Twitter to tell local media to cover your story!

Stream live video of your Occupy event to the internet using Livestream:

Livestream is offering free, premium streaming to Occupy groups.

1. Create an account: <http://www.livestream.com/platform/livetvbroadcasts/gettingstarted>
2. Write to the editors of globalrevolution.tv at operations@globalrevolution.tv to request your Occupy channel be upgraded to a premium account.
3. Use this tutorial to get streaming:
http://www.livestream.com/userguide/index.php?title=Broadcast_live

Collaborate online with a wiki:

- Check out Occupy Together as an example: <http://occupytogether.wikispot.org/>
- Tutorial: http://wikispot.org/Create_a_wiki