Community Council Issue Paper 3:

Organizational Structure

Summary of the issue

Our organizational structure strongly influences what we do, how we do it, and our impact on the world. How we structure ourselves as an organization should be rooted in strategic consideration of the influence and effects we seek to have in the world. It should be an articulation of our goals and mission, and rooted in our values.

Over the last 13 years, Global Voices has evolved from a small group of volunteers to a non-profit organization with two legal entities, and multiple tiers of paid and volunteer work.

In this poll, we consider the question of decision-making and authority within Global Voices. ask: **should we decentralize decision-making and governance, or should we centralize it further?**

Whether we choose to maintain our current structure or alter it, our choices will determine where decision-making authority resides for our policies and activities. They will also influence the ways we grow and change, and our ability to raise and distribute funds.
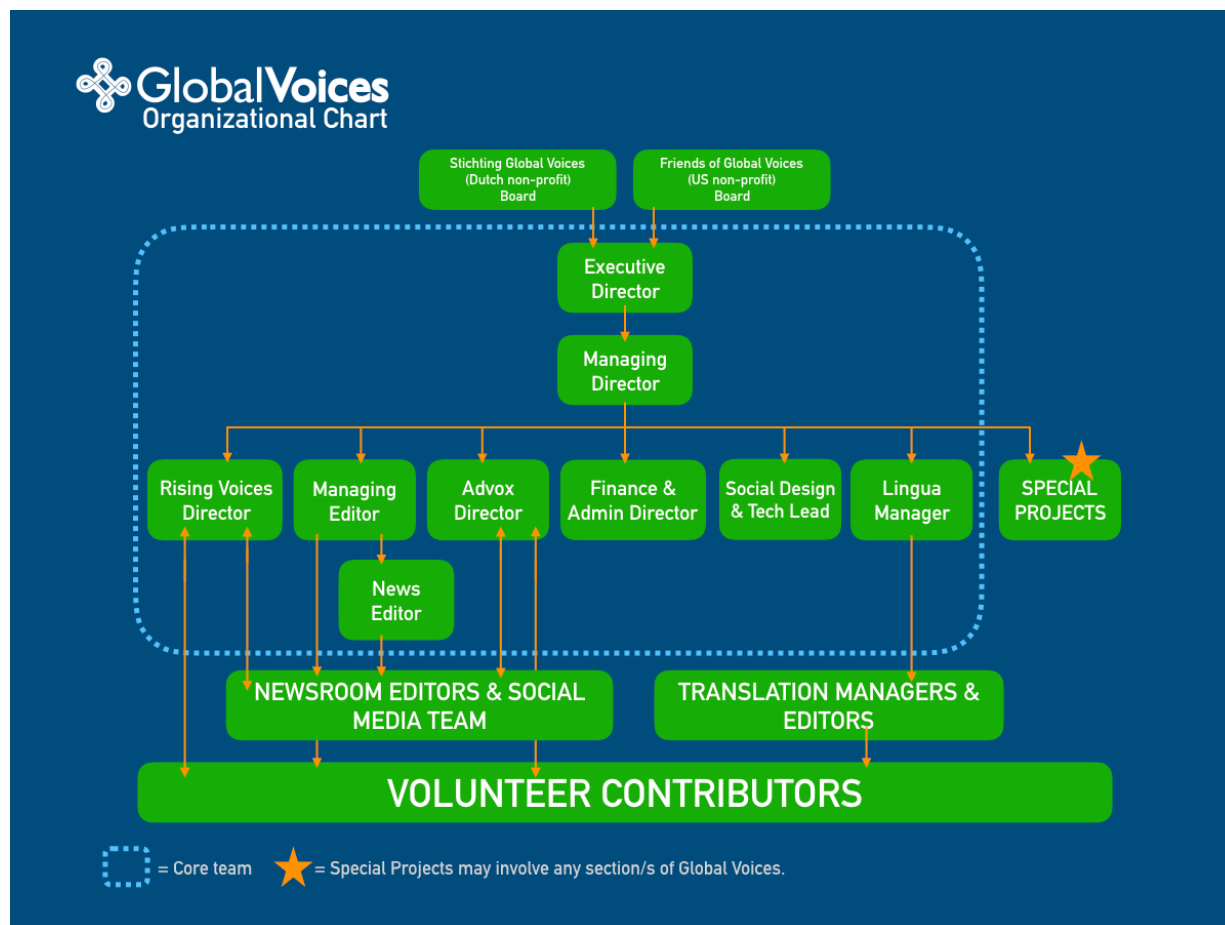
As we look ahead, we ask ourselves: **when it comes to organization, which structure will best serve our values and goals and help us succeed in our efforts?**

The origins of GV's present structure

Our current organizational structure is designed to minimize the formal, institutional aspects of Global Voices. Our virtual, distributed nature is intended to encourage informal and organic associations throughout our community. It allows us to stay open to new influences, ideas and people.

As our community has grown in size and complexity, this approach has become both a constraint and a benefit.

Global Voices is currently organized in three tiers: legal entities and board, staff and contributors.

GlobalVoices
Organizational Chart

Stichting Global Voices (Dutch non-profit) Board

Friends of Global Voices (US non-profit) Board

Executive Director

Managing Director

Rising Voices Director — Managing Editor — Advox Director — Finance & Admin Director — Social Design & Tech Lead — Lingua Manager — SPECIAL PROJECTS

News Editor

NEWSROOM EDITORS & SOCIAL MEDIA TEAM

TRANSLATION MANAGERS & EDITORS

VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS

= Core team   = Special Projects may involve any section/s of Global Voices.

Legal entities and board:

Global Voices has two legal entities:

- **Stichting Global Voices**, a nonprofit based in the Netherlands, governs all Global Voices operations
- **Friends of Global Voices**, a nonprofit based in the United States, is established for fundraising purposes

Each of our legal entities has a governance board. Boards are comprised of our founders, appointed experts, and elected community members. The boards have formal authority to oversee financial, administrative and human resource policies and legal standing of Global Voices.

The board of Stichting Global Voices reviews and approves our strategies, mission and goals, and activities. This board is also responsible for hiring and oversight of our executive director.

Staffing:

Most individuals who receive funds from GV are not employees; they are independent contractors working on medium-term contracts with autonomy to manage their own schedules, accept other work, and participate in other communities. Hiring independent contractors rather than full-time employees allows us to keep "overhead" (administrative costs) relatively low. It also allows us to support and involve people living in many different countries.

GV Staff are:

Independent contractors, NOT employees

Free to manage own schedules, accept other work, & participate in other communities

Autonomous

Core team:

Global Voices' core team is entrusted with policy-making and strategic planning in the best interest of the mission and community of GV. The core team is made up of the executive and support team and leads of sections who are central to Global Voices' mission: the Newsroom, Lingua, Advox and Rising Voices.

Most decision-making authority for organizational issues sits with the core team. These include:

governance of the organization

community support

creation and direction of activities

finances; administration of legal status and related matters

fundraising

human resources

technology choice and management

Regional and language team leaders:

Within the Newsroom and Lingua, we have editors and translation managers organized by region, language, and topic (in the cases of RuNet Echo and Advox).

Newsroom editors are responsible for providing coverage of citizen media in their regions for global audiences, in accordance with Global Voices' editorial guidelines, organizational culture and mission. Sub-editors provide editing, verification and technical support. Newsroom editors maintain authority over the following activities:

editorial decisions related to topics

coverage and focus

pursuing editorial partnerships

recruiting and training new contributors

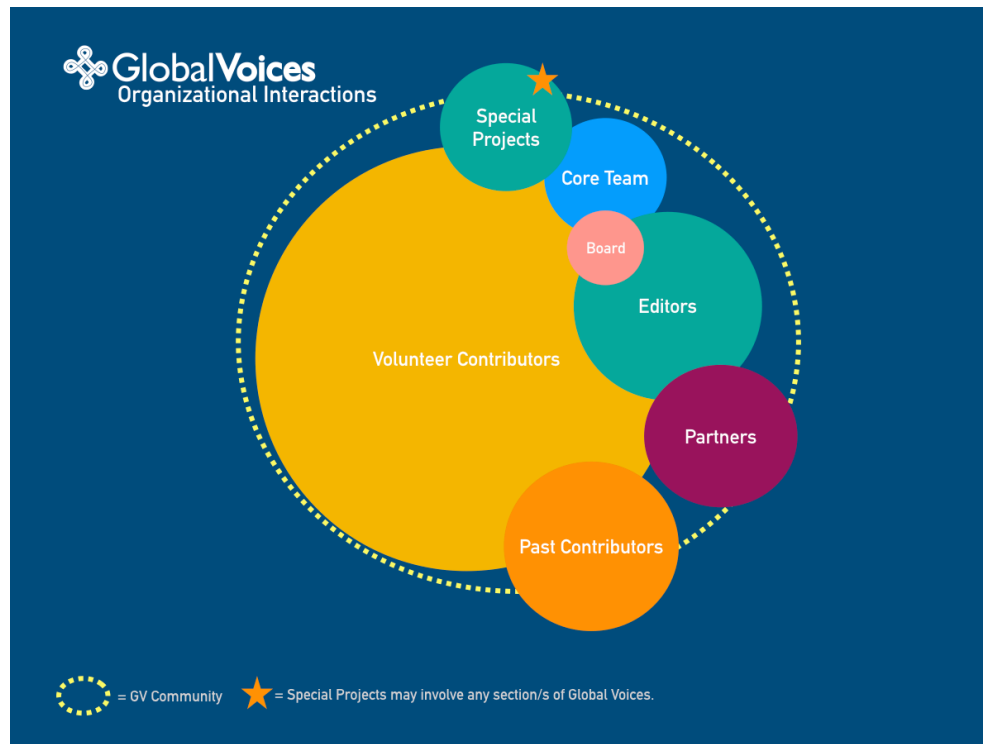*organizing communications within their region or language*

Translation managers and editors are responsible for ensuring the translation of stories from Global Voices' various sections into other languages. Translation managers maintain authority over the following activities:

setting activity priorities for their translation community   *organizing communications within their sub-community*
recruiting and training news translators

Contributors:

Over 6,000 people have contributed to Global Voices since our inception. Contributor participation is informally organized. Contributors shape community norms, propose editorial themes, choose stories, topics and translations, and propose and sometimes create new projects or campaigns.

Pros and cons of current model

Pro	Con
Legal entities in both Europe and North America diversify our identity beyond a single country, provide legal protections, and expand our fundraising opportunities and contacts with partners.	Legal identities in only North America and Europe mean that we necessarily function as a Global North organization—a disadvantage in certain countries and contexts. Also, we often do not qualify for funds for Global South communities and organizations.
As a globally distributed team, we can work from anywhere and be of any national identity. This allows us to engage with different communities, languages and politics, which in turn informs our work with GV.	Insufficient resources and staff to manage all tasks and provide enough support to teams. Tension between open environment for community contributions and increasingly goal-oriented mission, supporters and donors. As a global, virtual team, it can be difficult to plan, strategize and work together in a time-efficient manner. Staff who are part-time contractors often lack time or capacity to reach their full potential in organizing editorial projects and community activities.

Pro	Con
Volunteer translation managers and editors are closest to an ideal of community values; openness is key to new languages and new people.	We lack resources to support translation managers We are not able to translate to all languages; some teams translate many more posts than others. Tasks that require ongoing attention, such as media partnerships, social media discussion and promotion are difficult to maintain.
Volunteer contributors offer a diversity of knowledge and skills from around the world.	Large, distributed community and lack of staff support mean that volunteers may not be aware of GV's activities, priorities and goals, or struggle to understand how to participate. We are not able to write about all places or issues; some regions or topics get more coverage than others. More rules, standards and editing increase barriers for volunteers with limited time to meaningfully participate.

Organizational Models (comparative)

Description

Centralized	GV Classic	Hub and Spoke (Regionalization)	Hub and Network (Chapters)	Membership	Hybrid (integration of centralised and distributed models)
A centralized organization with clear lines of authority and responsibility, and a central framework for processes and activities.	GV as currently organized.	Regional and language teams each set their own priorities and develop activities based on regional needs and concerns.	Regional and language-based chapters each set their own priorities and develop activities based on their needs and concerns, and collectively form a network. GV chapters could exist as informal collectives, work in partnership with local organizations, or form their own legally established organizations.	A decentralized organization, similar to our current structure, with a new "membership" layer that carries greater rights and responsibilities. Contributors may become members, and thereby participate in setting priorities and running projects.	Clear division of authority between global and cross-regional work run by a central authority, and regional efforts run by chapters and/or partners.

Governance

Centralized	GV Classic	Hub and Spoke (Regionalization)	Hub and Network (Chapters)	Membership	Hybrid (integration of centralised and distributed models)
Maintain current legal entities and boards.	Maintain current legal entities and boards.	Maintain current legal entities and boards.	Maintain our current legal entities and create chapters based on regions, languages or other key criteria. Chapter leaderships set their own activities and priorities, with minimal oversight from executive staff. Boards may grow to accommodate more roles for network members.	Maintain our current legal entities, possible change in bylaws to voting procedures for board representation. We also form a member-based advisory council that debates and sets project and policy priorities.	Maintain our current legal entities, adding chapters to form a network. Board structures may change to accommodate more roles for network members.

Authority & Decision-making

Centralized	GV Classic	Hub and Spoke (Regionalization)	Hub and Network (Chapters)	Membership	Hybrid (integration of centralised and distributed models)
Core management team sets strategy, goals, and fundraising, and resource allocation; section leaders create systems to design and facilitate activities. Section teams (Newsroom, Lingua, et. al.) execute processes as articulated by core team. Contributors participate in projects and activities based on their own interest and initiative; may run for community representative board seats	Core team supports organizational policies, priorities, and activities in consultation with virtual and distributed teams and with oversight from governance boards. Regional and language teams set priorities for editorial coverage, translation, campaigns and other activities. Contributors decide topics and stories based on their own initiative, may run for community representative board seats.	A core team provides administrative, financial and technical support. Fundraising continues be undertaken by two primary legal entities, in support of regional initiatives. Regional and language teams have authority to determine editorial focus, processes and outputs; Lingua teams have authority to decide translation strategy, processes and outputs. Contributors participate in projects and activities based on their own interest and initiative, may run for community representative board seats.	Executive staff and existing legal entities provide administrative, financial and technical support, coordinating work, fundraising and fiscal sponsorship in collaboration with network partners. Chapters set priorities for editorial coverage, translation, campaigns and other activities. Contributors participate in projects and activities within chapters.	A core team and existing legal entities provide administrative, financial and technical support for global issues, coordinating work, fundraising and fiscal sponsorship in collaboration with members as represented through advisory council. Regional and language teams, working with groups of members, set priorities for editorial coverage, translation, campaigns and other activities. Contributors continue to write, translate and participate in many other ways. Contributors may become members, but could also take on less intensive roles.	Core team and existing legal entities provide administrative, financial, technical and managerial support for global and cross-regional projects, fundraising and fiscal sponsorship in collaboration with chapters. Regional chapters set priorities for editorial coverage, translation, campaigns and other activities. Contributors may participate in projects and activities within the central organization and with regional chapters.

Pros

Centralized	GV Classic	Hub and Spoke (Regionalization)	Hub and Network (Chapters)	Membership	Hybrid (integration of centralised and distributed models)
Standardization of systems and processes makes for faster decision-making and responsiveness to opportunities for projects and activities.	Minimal bureaucracy. Staff and community members have substantial authority over priorities and decisions within their own sections, and paths to provide input on mission, goals, and organization-wide priorities. Community members can propose stories, projects, and campaigns.	Regional teams have greater awareness of regional needs and interests and can be more responsive to those concerns. More awareness of national and region-specific interests could attract new audiences and collaborators. Honors the sense of ownership felt by many contributors. Regional teams can tailor projects and activities to suit their needs. Regional focus may open up new funding opportunities.	More responsive to local initiatives, ideas and priorities. New opportunities for fundraising in local markets. Projects, activities and editorial output can vary by region and be tailored to regional interests.	Clarifies distinctions between GVers dedicated to the field as a career (members), and those who prefer a less formal affiliation (contributors) Honors the sense of ownership felt by many long-term contributors; captures and enforces the identity of GV as embodied in GV Summits. Offers path to growth, skills and greater expertise for members.	Combines global, regional and local leadership and knowledge. Offers contributors a range of ways to participate. Those who want to focus on local work may works with chapters, while those interested in cross-regional and global projects may work with the central team. Many opportunities to pursue different types of funding. Many different ways to participate.

Cons

Centralized	GV Classic	Hub and Spoke (Regionalization)	Hub and Network (Chapters)	Membership	Hybrid (integration of centralised and distributed models)
Could erode community focus and diminish volunteer spirit. Organization may be less receptive to ideas and stories that arise outside of standard processes and systems.	It is not always clear who has authority to create and run activities. This can lead to tension in the community. Small proportion of leadership roles (relative to the quantity of active volunteers) makes it difficult to support all contributor ideas and needs. Decentralized approach to editorial coverage (in which contributors decide story topics) makes it difficult to set organizational strategy and goals.	Community may lose its global character and potential for audiences connecting across cultures and languages. Regions or languages that do not have a team will be underrepresented within Global Voices. Regional teams will need to bear increased administrative burden to manage projects. Competition with other organizations with similar models for funding and talent.	Difficult to set and manage rules for participation across different chapters. Effort and energy needed to build new chapters, not all of which will succeed. Possible competition for fundraising between chapters. Brand identity is vulnerable – a mistake or unethical action in one chapter could affect the reputation of the whole network. For languages spoken in many countries, potential conflict over location of chapter, dialect preference, decision-making authority. Countries where multiple languages are spoken might encounter similar challenges, or the domination of one specific language/cultural group. No single language publishes all stories, losing idea of unified audience connecting across cultures and languages. May compete with other organizations with similar models for funding and talent.	Membership organizations need careful governance; decision-making can be slow and hard to manage. Setting membership standards would decrease our openness to contributors who have unique knowledge, but might not have the required skill sets or experience for membership. Members may disagree on principles or priorities, leading to conflict and factionalism. Difficult to create clear benefits to and incentives for membership..	Creating and managing an optimal governance structure could be time-consuming and difficult. Finding balance between global and regional priorities will be challenging. Network structure may detract from our sense of a single community. Costs for managing multiple paths of development could be high.

Organizational Models (unified)

Centralized

Description	A centralized organization with clear lines of authority and responsibility, and a central framework for processes and activities.
Governance	Maintain current legal entities and boards.
Authority and Decision- making	Core management team sets strategy, goals, and fundraising, and resource allocation; section leaders create systems to design and facilitate activities. Section teams (Newsroom, Lingua, et. al.) execute processes as articulated by core team. Contributors participate in projects and activities based on their own interest and initiative; may run for community representative board seats Contributors participate in structured processes for deliberation of topics and priorities, for choice of programmatic and activity focus.
Pros	Standardization of systems and processes makes for faster decision-making and responsiveness to opportunities for projects and activities.
Cons	Could erode community focus and diminish volunteer spirit. Organization may be less receptive to ideas and stories that arise outside of standard processes and systems.

GV Classic

Description	GV as currently organized.
Governance	Maintain current legal entities and boards.
Decision- making	Core team supports organizational policies, priorities, and activities in consultation with virtual and distributed teams and with oversight from governance boards. Regional and language teams set priorities for editorial coverage, translation, campaigns and other activities. Contributors decide topics and stories based on their own initiative, may run for community representative board seats.
Pros	Minimal bureaucracy. Staff and community members have substantial authority over priorities and decisions within their own sections, and paths to provide input on mission, goals, and organization-wide priorities. Community members can propose stories, projects, and campaigns.
Cons	It is not always clear who has authority to create and run activities. This can lead to tension in the community. Small proportion of leadership roles (relative to the quantity of active volunteers) makes it difficult to support all contributor ideas and needs. Decentralized approach to editorial coverage (in which contributors decide story topics) makes it difficult to set organizational strategy and goals.

Hub and Spoke (Regionalization)

Description	Regional and language teams each set their own priorities and develop activities based on regional needs and concerns.
Governance	Maintain legal entities and boards.
Decision- making	A core team provides administrative, financial and technical support. Fundraising continues be undertaken by two primary legal entities, in support of regional initiatives. Regional and language teams have authority to determine editorial focus, processes and outputs; Lingua teams have authority to decide translation strategy, processes and outputs. Contributors participate in projects and activities based on their own interest and initiative, may run for community representative board seats.
Pros	Regional teams have greater awareness of regional needs and interests and can be more responsive to those concerns. More awareness of national and region-specific interests could attract new audiences and collaborators. Honors the sense of ownership felt by many contributors. Regional teams can tailor projects and activities to suit their needs. Regional focus may open up new funding opportunities.

Cons	Community may lose its global character and potential for audiences connecting across cultures and languages.
	Regions or languages that do not have a team will be underrepresented within Global Voices.
	Regional teams will need to bear increased administrative burden to manage projects.
	Competition with other organizations with similar models for funding and talent.

Hub and Network (Chapters)

Description	Regional and language-based chapters each set their own priorities and develop activities based on their needs and concerns, and collectively form a network. GV chapters could exist as informal collectives, work in partnership with local organizations, or form their own legally established organizations.
Governance	Maintain our current legal entities and create chapters based on regions, languages or other key criteria. Chapter leaderships set their own activities and priorities, with minimal oversight from executive staff. Boards may grow to accommodate more roles for network members.
Decision- making	Executive staff and existing legal entities provide administrative, financial and technical support, coordinating work, fundraising and fiscal sponsorship in collaboration with network partners. Chapters set priorities for editorial coverage, translation, campaigns and other activities. Contributors participate in projects and activities within chapters.

Pros	More responsive to local initiatives, ideas and priorities.
	New opportunities for fundraising in local markets.
	Projects, activities and editorial output can vary by region and be tailored to regional interests.
Cons	Difficult to set and manage rules for participation across different chapters.
	Effort and energy needed to build new chapters, not all of which will succeed.
	Possible competition for fundraising between chapters.
	Brand identity is vulnerable – a mistake or unethical action in one chapter could affect the reputation of the whole network.
	For languages spoken in many countries, potential conflict over location of chapter, dialect preference, decision-making authority.
	Countries where multiple languages are spoken might encounter similar challenges, or the domination of one specific language/cultural group.
	No single language publishes all stories, losing idea of unified audience connecting across cultures and languages.
	May compete with other organizations with similar models for funding and talent.

Membership

Description	A decentralized organization, similar to our current structure, with a new "membership" layer that carries greater rights and responsibilities. Contributors may become members, and thereby participate in setting priorities and running projects.
Governance	Maintain our current legal entities, possible change in bylaws to voting procedures for board representation. We also form a member-based advisory council that debates and sets project and policy priorities.
Authority and Decision- making	A core team and existing legal entities provide administrative, financial and technical support for global issues, coordinating work, fundraising and fiscal sponsorship in collaboration with members as represented through advisory council. Regional and language teams, working with groups of members, set priorities for editorial coverage, translation, campaigns and other activities. Contributors continue to write, translate and participate in many other ways. Contributors may become members, but could also take on less intensive roles.

| Pros | Clarifies distinctions between GVers dedicated to the field as a career (members), and those who prefer a less formal affiliation (contributors)

Honors the sense of ownership felt by many long-term contributors; captures and enforces the identity of GV as embodied in GV Summits.

Offers path to growth, skills and greater expertise for members. |
|---|---|
| Cons | Membership organizations need careful governance; decision-making can be slow and hard to manage.

Setting membership standards would decrease our openness to contributors who have unique knowledge, but might not have the required skill sets or experience for membership.

Members may disagree on principles or priorities, leading to conflict and factionalism.

Difficult to create clear benefits to and incentives for membership. |

Hybrid (integration of centralized and distributed models)

Description	Clear division of authority between global and cross-regional work run by a central authority, and regional efforts run by chapters and/or partners.
Governance	Maintain our current legal entities, adding chapters to form a network. Board structures may change to accommodate more roles for network members.

Authority and Decision-making	Core team and existing legal entities provide administrative, financial, technical and managerial support for global and cross-regional projects, fundraising and fiscal sponsorship in collaboration with chapters. Regional chapters set priorities for editorial coverage, translation, campaigns and other activities. Contributors may participate in projects and activities within the central organization and with regional chapters.
Pros	Combines global, regional and local leadership and knowledge. Offers contributors a range of ways to participate. Those who want to focus on local work may works with chapters, while those interested in cross-regional and global projects may work with the central team. Many opportunities to pursue different types of funding. Many different ways to participate.
Cons	Creating and managing an optimal governance structure could be time-consuming and difficult. Finding balance between global and regional priorities will be challenging. Network structure may detract from our sense of a single community. Costs for managing multiple paths of development could be high.