



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on November 4, 2011

ACORN Officials Cover Up Occupy Wall Street Involvement

After being exposed for their involvement in the Occupy Wall Street protests, officials with the former New York office of ACORN are firing staff, shredding documents, and blaming “disgruntled ex-employees” for leaking information relating to their collaboration with various protests in and around Zuccotti Park. Fox News reported last week that the former ACORN office, now operating as New York Communities for Change (NYCC), coordinated “guerrilla” protest events, hired “door-to-door canvassers” to collect donations, and gathered 100 former ACORN-affiliated employees to attend OWS protests. The organization also recruited homeless people and paid them \$10 an hour to protest, sources told Fox News.



The NYCC was formed in late 2009 after ACORN lost congressional funding and much of its private supporters in the wake of a scandal. At the time, critics contended that the move was simply a desperate attempt to rebrand its name and restore funding. But the NYCC is virtually the same entity, as it uses the same offices and operates almost entirely with the same officials and employees.

NYCC Executive Director Jon Kest and his top aides have been working at OWS protests and generating money for the NYCC for various expenses related to the movement, including supplies, staff wages, and travel expenses for ex-ACORN employees. “All the money collected from canvasses is pooled together back at the office, and everything we’ve been working on for the last year is going to the protests, against big banks and to pay peoples salaries and those people on salary are, of course, being paid to go to the protests every day,” a NYCC staff member told Fox.

However, donors were not told that their contributions were funding the protests. “They give contributions because we say if they do we can fix things whatever specific problem they’re having in their area, housing, schools, whatever... then we spend the contributions paying staff to be at the protests all day, every day. That’s where these contributions the community’s money is going,” the source disclosed. “They’re doing the same stuff now that got ACORN in trouble to begin with. And yes, we were still ACORN, there is still a national ACORN.”

Mr. Kest has been a bold supporter of the OWS movement, as he [wrote](#) in a September 30 article for the *Huffington Post*:

It has been amazing watching #OccupyWallStreet grow over the past two weeks. As someone who has been involved in the social justice movement in New York for more than 30 years, it’s a rare occasion that I get to watch a movement like this develop from the outside.

Over the past several years, while the big banks have destroyed our economy and working people have fought to make do with less and less, the richest 1 percent of Americans continue to take of



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more of the pie.

That's why I'm excited to announce that New York Communities for Change and many of our allies in community organizing and labor will be showing our support for #OccupyWallStreet next week.

Neither Kest nor his communications director accepted requests for comment, and a Fox News producer was told during a visit to the Brooklyn office, "The best people to speak to who are involved with Occupy Wall Street are not available."

The organization responded in a Twitter message, calling Fox's story a "smear campaign." "Fox News is trying to discredit Occupy Wall Street. New York Communities for Change is a new organization that fights for low- and moderate-income families," the organization professed in an online statement. "We don't pay protesters and any monies raised by NYCC's canvass are used in support of our ongoing issue campaigns. Period."

In an effort to save face, NYCC is taking frantic measures to liquidate all its evidence, Fox reported Thursday. In addition to firing workers and destroying pertinent documents, the organization is installing surveillance and recording devices at its Brooklyn offices and stashing all supplies labeled with the ACORN name. "They're doing serious damage control right now," a NYCC source [told](#) Fox.

Since the original report, Mr. Kest has called a series of emergency meetings to discuss the controversy, while taking "extreme measures" to quell the whistleblowers who tipped the operation. Two employees were fired after NYCC officials deemed them responsible for the leak. "One was fired the day the story came out, the other was fired Friday. [NYCC senior staff] told everyone that they were fired because they talked to you," another source told a Fox reporter.

Immediately following Fox's original publication, NYCC's organizing director, Jonathan Westin, called a meeting where he distributed the article to each employee and read through it line by line. "They reminded us that we can get fired, sued, arrested for talking to the press," the source reported. "Then they went through the article point-by-point and said that the allegation that we pay people to protest isn't true." However, Mr. Westin met resistance from a few employees:

It was pretty funny. Jonathan told staff they don't pay for protesters, but the people in the meeting who work there objected and said, "Wait, you pay us to go to the protests every day?" Then Jonathan said "No, but that's your job," and staffers were like, "Yeah, our job is to protest," and Westin said, "No, your job is to fight for economic and social justice. We just send you to protest."

Staff said, "Yes, you pay us to carry signs." Then Jonathan says, "That's your job." It went on like that back and forth for a while.

After providing photos of Fox News staff to each of the employees, Westin and NYCC Deputy Director Greg Basta warned that Fox and other media outlets might confront them about the publication. "They told us if people bring up the article, we're supposed to say the source and all the stuff in there came from a disgruntled ex-employee who's not working with us anymore," the source disclosed.

NYCC officials are now monitoring employee behavior, while prohibiting texting and phone calls in the office. All phone conversations must be made in the waiting room, where there is an intercom, so management can monitor all outgoing communication. Further, cameras and speakers are being installed virtually everywhere inside and outside of the office. "It's almost like working at Fort Knox," the source said.



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