


American Guild of Organists

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS AND THE AMERICAN ORGANIST MAGAZINE
475 RIVERSIDE DRIVE • SUITE 1260 • NEW YORK, NY 10115 • 212-870-2310
FAX 212-870-2163 • E-MAIL info@agohq.org • WEB SITE www.agohq.org

MEMORANDUM

TO: AGO Volunteer Leadership

FROM: James E. Thomashower, Executive Director 

RE: Policies and procedures regarding reimbursement of expenses for travel, lodging and meals, plus directions to headquarters and safety tips

DATE: August 1, 2012

I. Reimbursement Policies

The annual budgets for volunteer leadership (National Council and Committees) allow for the reimbursement of reasonable expenses for travel, lodging, meals and certain other incidentals incurred by volunteers while on Guild business away from home. Always request reimbursement using the forms provided by AGO Headquarters, and please include required receipts. Checks for reimbursement will be issued within 30 days. You may request reimbursement in advance of travel if you have paid the expense or charged it to a credit card.

If you prefer to donate your expenses to the Guild, your gift is tax deductible as an out-of-pocket expense for volunteer activities for a charitable organization. Simply accept reimbursement, and then return all or part of the amount to the Annual Fund or the Endowment Fund by check.

A. Air Travel: Airline travel will be reimbursed at the lowest attainable fare. Fares should be reported to the committee director responsible for the meeting before tickets are purchased. Travel arrangements are made by each individual.

Committee Directors: It is important to estimate the total of members' fares for any one meeting before tickets are purchased. If any planned meeting's expenses will exceed a committee's annual budget, the meeting may be cancelled.

For those who are able to stay over a Saturday night (following a Friday meeting or preceding a Monday meeting), an extra night's lodging and per diem will be paid -- if the fare difference is greater than the cost of the extra overnight stay. Paying a substitute for Sunday services will also be considered if the costs of the substitute, lodging, and per diem are less than the regular fare.

B. Auto Travel: Use of your car will be reimbursed at the standard government rate (currently 55.5 cents per mile) up to the amount of the lowest possible air fare for your itinerary, plus tolls and parking.

Travel Policies, page 2.

C. Other Travel: The actual expenses of getting to and from airports by car, bus, shuttle, van, taxi, or mass transit will be reimbursed, as will the cost of parking at an airport while you are away.

D. Lodging: In most cases, the Guild will cover a maximum of one night's lodging expense per meeting day. Committee directors are asked to schedule meetings so that as many members as possible may return home on the same day as the meeting. Any stay beyond one night per meeting day at Guild expense must be approved in advance.

Hotel in New York: In New York City, lodging is provided at various modestly priced hotels that provide basic accommodations. Reservations may be made through AGO Headquarters, e-mail info@agohq.org or phone 212-870-2310. In some facilities, room charges are billed directly to the Guild, but individuals are always responsible for incidentals upon check-out. Alternatively, individuals may make their own reservations. Under such circumstances, reimbursement will not exceed the cost of a room reserved through AGO Headquarters.

In other cities: Special arrangements will be made in advance for lodging.

E. Meals: Expenses for meals will be reimbursed up to a limit based on current federal guidelines (provide receipts). The per day maximum will be reduced if any meals are provided by the Guild.

F. Substitute Organists: Reimbursement for substitute organists will only be made for out-of-pocket payments required by attendance at official AGO meetings.

Remember that the better you control your personal expenses, the more funds you will have for your programs. Please be thrifty!

II. Getting to Headquarters:

AGO Headquarters is located in the Interchurch Center, 475 Riverside Drive, Ste. 1260, in the Morningside Heights section of Manhattan, adjacent to Columbia University and The Riverside Church. The entrance normally used is 61 Claremont Avenue, between 119th and 120th Streets.

A. Airports: New York City is served by three principal airports: LaGuardia (LGA) and JFK in Queens, and Newark Liberty in New Jersey.

B. Trains run from both JFK and Newark Liberty airports: The JFK AirTrain connects to the Long Island Railroad at Jamaica Station, arriving in Manhattan at Penn Station for a total cost of \$13.75. The NJTransit AirTrain also connects to Penn Station and costs \$12.50.

Travel Policies, page 3.

C. Buses and Vans are available at low cost from all airports: New York Airport Service Transportation (formerly Carey Buses) serves LGA (\$12 one-way/\$21 round-trip) and JFK (\$15 one-way/\$25 round-trip) to and from Grand Central Station. The fare on Olympia Trails to and from Newark Liberty is \$16 one-way or \$28 round-trip. Olympia Trails buses unload at Port Authority Bus Terminal (41st Street between 8th and 9th Avenues), Bryant Park (42nd Street & 5th Avenue) and Grand Central Station (41st Street between Park & Lexington Avenues). NYAS buses unload at 125 Park Ave. near Grand Central Terminal. Taxis are plentiful there.

D. SuperShuttle: To reach this nationally recognized airport van service, call 212-BLUE-VAN (212-258-3826) or visit their web site at <http://www.supershuttle.com/>. Follow the signs to the Ground Transportation Desk near the Baggage Claim area. Ask an agent to arrange for SuperShuttle service, or you can call Supershuttle direct from the courtesy phone next to the Ground Transportation Desk.

E. Cabs are available at well marked dispatch areas at the airports. The fare (including tolls and tip) from LaGuardia to Headquarters is about \$30-\$35 and about \$35-\$40 to most AGO recommended hotels depending upon the hotel route and traffic. There is a \$45 fixed rate (plus tolls) from JFK. Cabs from Newark are not recommended, as an interstate surcharge is imposed.

General Warning: Do not take any type of taxi or limousine (unless pre-arranged) other than a "medallion" cab-- these are the ubiquitous yellow cabs with a light on top (on when the cab is available, off when occupied). Meter rates are posted on the door. Yellow taxicabs are far from luxurious, but they are regulated, insured, etc. They are the only ones allowed to be dispatched from the taxi stands at the airports, bus, and train stations, and the only ones legally allowed to pick up passengers on the street. Drivers of all sorts of other vehicles converge on the arrival areas of the airports offering rides to the city. They are unauthorized, unregulated, and occasionally unscrupulous. It's best to avoid them.

Also, in yellow cabs, be aware that there are no (legitimate) extra fees for additional passengers or luggage and there is not a zone system. Within the city the fare will be what the meter reads. It is best, also, to give clear instructions about where you want to go and the route to take. Destinations are sometimes expressed as an intersection rather than address: For AGO Headquarters, "120th between Broadway and Riverside Drive."

From either LaGuardia or JFK, the best route to AGO Headquarters is via the Robert F. Kennedy Triborough Bridge (Toll ranges from \$4.80 to \$6.50) and across Manhattan on either 125th Street or 126th Street to Broadway.

To Headquarters from the Hotel:

Subway: Air conditioned and graffiti-free, the subway is the fastest and cheapest way to get around town. If you have never used the New York City subway, it might be best to go with an experienced rider the first time. Take the IRT #1 train (local) to 116th Street and Broadway (Columbia University Station). The fare is \$2.25 for a single ride. Metrocards may be purchased in subway stations.

Travel Policies, page 4.

Exit the station to the left (west side of Broadway), walk towards the river down the hill on 116th St., turn right on Claremont Avenue and walk uptown along Claremont to the Interchurch Center (61 Claremont).

Cabs are an alternative for the less adventuresome. If possible, arrange to share with others attending the same meeting. A yellow cab can accommodate four passengers for the same fare as one.

III. Safety Tips-- "Street Smarts"

While the areas you are likely to frequent in New York City are certainly among the safest, normal "big city" precautions should always be taken. Be aware of your surroundings and others around you. Don't venture alone into unknown territory. Be sure purses and briefcases are securely closed and carried in such a way as to be in your control. Don't leave anything (luggage, packages, briefcases) unattended anywhere. Put wallets in inside pockets in crowded situations. Avoid visible jewelry on the street and in the subway. Be wary of people offering to sell things on the street.

New Yorkers are a wonderful mix of cautious and friendly. They will usually help with directions, etc., if you ask, but rarely will they venture into anyone else's "space" by chatting with strangers.

Do not feel compelled to give money to beggars. Panhandling is illegal. Now, enjoy your visit!