

## **Tips for doing General Assembly on a budget**

UUA General Assembly is really freaking expensive. And that sucks. It sucks for folks who are poor or working class or dealing with financial challenges. It makes it even harder for lots of folks who face oppression (like folks who are young or folks of color or trans/gender non-conforming folks or folks with disabilities) to get to GA. While the GA scholarship system is designed to try and help, we know the reality is that scholarship or no scholarship, it can be really rough trying to handle General Assembly on a reasonable budget.

While the long game goal is to make GA a more accessible and democratic gathering, and the *long* long game goal is to dismantle the white supremacist patriarchal ableist capitalist system that makes resources so unevenly dispersed, here's a short game sheet of tips for making GA possible on a smaller budget. Geared toward young adults, and usable by anyone who is interested.

**Please add your tips for how you navigate GA on a budget!**

### General:

See if your congregation has funds to help pay the costs of sending delegates. Some of the larger ones do!

As of 5/11/17

The UU Women's Federation will stipend folks to work their booth. [Read more and apply!](#)

### Food:

If you have space bring a bag of snacks from home, and for coffee and tea drinkers bring a reusable travel mug and fill it with your own tea bags and instant coffee for travel. Many places will fill your mug with hot water for free.

### **Get to a grocery store!**

- Team up with others or go explore the city yourself to go to a grocery store for food, if it is a little more than walking distance you can use public transportation or a ride share app. Getting to a store can cut down on cost.
- Breakfast is an easy meal to go cheaper on - bring bread, peanut butter, bananas, apples, protein bars, granola / cereal (use the free milk outside a coffee shop that's for putting in coffee), instant oatmeal / oats with toppings (you can make hot water by running water through the coffee maker in your hotel room with no grounds in or at a coffee shop).
- Stockpile snacks from a grocery store in your room and bring them with you everyday so you don't get starving and end up having to buy that \$9 muffin.
- If your room has a fridge, buy cheese, hummus, veggies, yogurt etc. Call ahead and ask about fridges even if you don't see it on the website. Some places will put it in there if they know you want it!

- Bagels, cheese, and summer sausage will not go bad over a couple days unrefrigerated, even if the texture gets a little weird. This is also a good argument for jerky. If you're buying mostly cheap snacks, try for more fats and proteins and veggies and less sugar so you don't feel gross a few days in. Carrots, apples, avocados, and radishes will stay fairly whole in a bag... just keep the avocado toward the top and eat it first!
- Many grocery stores (especially Trader Joe's) sell dried and dehydrated fruits and veggies, which are great snacks, travel wonderfully, and can be combined with protein to make a nutritious meal.
- If you have the time and skill/desire, bake nutritious muffins at home and bag them individually in tightly-sealed plastic bags to bring along. Stash a few in a freezer, if you have access to one, to defrost later, making sure they'll stay fresh for later on in the week.
- Buy a big bag of nuts/seeds in bulk and portion it out ahead of time into individual bags that you can toss into your backpack as needed. This is a great strategy in general-- shop at home, portion things out, and bring it with you so that you aren't stuck trying to get to a grocery store if it isn't practical or possible. You can fly with almost any food, with the exception of nut butters (considered a "gel" by TSA) and other liquids/gels.
- Ramen! If you buy one in a cup, you can keep the cup and break the ramen blocks (which cost 1/3 as much) into it whenever you want to make more. Mason jars also work well for this tactic!
- Team up with others to share food costs and you can buy larger quantities of things, which is cheaper per serving if multiple folks will be sharing it.
- Tortilla chips, a can of refried beans (either get the type you can open without a can opener, or make sure you have a can opener), and a jar of salsa make for cheap tacos, easily prepared.
- Find ways to socialize that aren't just going out to eat. Go for walks or sit outside with someone, share a table in the exhibit hall (there are often tables where it's fine if you've brought your own food), or eat your pre-packed food before going out to that restaurant with a group (you can just get coffee or something very small).

### **Find cheap/free food**

- Take advantage of local happy hour specials, many times there are food happy hour deals that can make getting food at restaurants less pricy.
- Some events have free food at GA - receptions, events with appetizers, lunches for particular groups - keep an eye out and even grab a ziplock or napkin to snag any leftovers.
- Events trying to attract Youth and YAs are especially likely to offer food!
- Carry a couple nesting tupperware or a couple of wide-mouth mason jars everywhere, and grab leftovers... heck, grab other people's leftovers if they're not interested in taking them along! Ziploc bags are a space saving alternative, though they aren't nice to the environment.

### Housing:

#### **Find roommates!**

- Lots of UU groups on Facebook are good places to post that you're looking for a roommate, and ones that cater to your identities can find you a roomie who you actually like and want to remain friends with after GA. If they fit you, try the UU Young Adult Connections, Raised

UU, UU Allies for Racial Equity Discussion Group, and more! You can try to find one or up to three roommates if people are comfortable sharing beds. More than that, and you may end up with not enough room keys for people to feel independent... and you'll run out of bed space, so this is only for those who like a good hard floor for sleeping.

- If you know folks going, work your networks - someone's parents or a board member might have extra room that they'd be willing to share. Or if you know someone who is getting their housing paid for, ask if you could tag along and share their bed / crash on the floor!

### **Find cheaper housing than the recommended GA hotels**

- Check out hostels or ask churches if they will let a small group rent the place for sleeping and use the kitchen. It's worth calling and asking around. The worst they can say is no. Ask beyond UU churches, and if you find a place, post it in a Facebook group or let your friends know so that you're helping beyond yourself. Be a interconnected web builder!
- Check out hotels further away from the convention center - be aware you don't want to get stuck paying a lot for lyft/taxis, but if you're willing to walk 30 mins each way or take public transit, go for it! And you'll also see more of the city!
- Can't find a roommate? If renting a car is significantly cheaper than a hotel, consider getting a car at the airport and bringing camping gear. Looking around the area for KOA, State Parks, or national forest lands within a 30-60 minute drive might be worth it to you? Don't sleep in the car. It's not restful and will make you cranky! Make sure you factor in parking costs downtown for the conference.
- Sometimes you can find a decent place to stay overnight using Airbnb. The best rates would likely come from renting a single room in a house in the area. If you can find a roommate and split the Airbnb room, you'll save money. Many Airbnb rooms have a full or queen bed, but some have twin beds or a bunk bed for people who room with them. For a little more money you can rent a whole apartment or house. If you can get a group together, this can be very affordable and you might have access to a kitchen which can help with food! If you fill all the rooms this can be as little as \$30 per person per night. Be sure to read the reviews of the person offering the room of course. There are many reliable, safe, clean hosts, but there are also surely some less reliable, less clean, less safe situations as well. So be smart and careful, and check out a few options before booking. After a while you'll likely be able to choose with greater confidence.
- Bring your sleeping bag to the conference center with you, and ask around. This only works if you're really extroverted, friendly, and non-anxious about having no plans and feeling like you might end up sleeping on the streets. Go to the YA meet and greet and ALL the events on Wednesday that you can fit in, make friends, and see if you could sleep on their floor for a night. Chances are, a few will say yes, and you only need 4 new friends for four nights!

### Travel:

- Ask congregants, family, friends if they have air miles they are able to donate.

- If you have time you might also look into traveling by bus or train, bus or train fare can be cheaper than other options but also may lengthen your travel time.
- Southwest has “Wanna Get Away” tickets that are way cheaper but less flexible (no refund for cancellation and the like). They are also one of the few airlines that haven’t had a media scandal lately.
- Be flexible with when you leave, flights leaving early Sunday or late Saturday are often cheaper than those later on Sunday.
- Depending on where you’re coming from, see if you can carpool with others. Again, work those networks. The more people in the car the cheaper it is when you split up gas costs, but it can add time depending on the length of the road trip.

Other:

Other items one may want to budget for:

- Souvenirs
- WiFi at the hotel/hostel
- Taxi/lyft to and from airport
- Bike rental
- Books and merchandise sold at workshops
- Small amount of emergency money
- Public transportation