

Intercultural Ministries of EGC

Host Households for Afghan Arrivals - FAQs

Who is involved in this effort?

The Emmanuel Gospel Center's (EGC) mission is to equip the Church to serve urban communities. Intercultural Ministries (IM) of EGC has a programmatic history in refugee work, partnering both with grassroots efforts and the official resettlement system in the US in an effort to welcome and serve refugee arrivals. More broadly, IM has an interest in supporting immigrant leaders and getting the Church behind their efforts. IM is the primary contact for host households. egc.org/intercultural

The Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Center (RIAC) was founded by Somali immigrants in 1993. It is a community-based, nonprofit, grassroots human service agency that provides comprehensive services to refugees, asylees, and immigrants as well as the larger community. RIAC's services include refugee resettlement, counseling, outreach and education, and other social services. RIAC is the primary contact for Afghan arrivals. riacboston.org

What is expected of me as a host?

Hosts are people with space in their homes and a willingness to open their doors. All that we expect is a bed, access to the kitchen and bathroom and a welcoming smile. It will be important for guests to retain as much agency as possible during the hosting arrangement, including making their own decisions about their desired level of privacy, as well as normal adult freedom to come and go on their own schedule. Hosting engagements could last anywhere from a few weeks up to 3 months.

Who are these Afghan guests?

Guests are evacuees from Afghanistan who are arriving on Humanitarian Parole. They are asylum seekers, which means they are starting the process of applying for legal permanent status in the US. Many were employed as translators, intelligence gatherers, worked at an embassy, or on specific US projects. As a

result, they were at high risk of Taliban retaliation following the departure of the US military.

Will my guests have money?

Most arrivals will be initially without income, but RIAC will help them fill out paperwork for work authorization within a week or two of arrival and help them find employment. ***New development as of 10/1, after IM's recorded host info session:*** The federal government has allocated some funds for Afghan arrivals, including limited cash assistance and food stamps. RIAC has committed that host families will not be responsible for paying for food or other necessities for their guests. IM is also raising money that may supplement other funding sources.

What about mealtimes?

Some hosts and guests may choose to eat some meals together. Others may choose to cook and eat separately. Both arrangements are perfectly fine, just as if you were deciding about meals with roommates sharing a home. During Intercultural Ministries' orientation, hosts will learn about important dietary customs for Afghans so they can feel more confident navigating places of difference.

What about language?

Most individuals in this group of arrivals will speak Dari, Pashto, or both. Many will also speak English because of their roles working with Americans. If you speak a language that may help you communicate, please note that on your application. If not, RIAC will match you with someone who has familiarity with English.

What about transportation to appointments?

RIAC and IM are working together to identify volunteers who can help with transportation for appointments or other needs. Ideally host homes will be located close to public transportation, allowing many guests the freedom of getting themselves where they need to be, once they have their bearings.

What about COVID?

This is indeed a strange time to be a host or a guest. All arrivals who are old enough to receive the vaccine will have been immunized for COVID prior to arriving in Massachusetts. RIAC requires that all host households also be immunized. School-aged children will start public school in the host household's community, and will follow the protocols in place for that school district.

Can I charge my guests rent?

One of the most difficult things for asylum seekers is the initial lack of income. We seek to host from a place of generosity. But beyond that, we are also focused on the security of both guests and hosts. Guests are staying by invitation, not because they have a legal right to a property. However, if a host accepts money or communicates anything suggesting there could be a tenancy, this can cause serious complications. Accepting compensation could also put your home in a short-term rental category, which has implications for homeowners insurance and leases. **Hosts should not accept money or services from their guests in return for a place to stay.**

That said, depending on the situation, a guest may wish to contribute in some way to the functioning of the household. Appropriate contributions might include teaching the host how to prepare a favorite meal, cleaning up together, or even perhaps doing some household shopping once a guest has a job. Hosts may choose to accept these kinds of offers.

Note: If you have a property that you'd like to affordably rent outside of a hosting relationship, please contact Sarah Blumenshine at sblumenshine@egc.org to start the conversation.

What is the initial host home visit?

A designated staff person from IM or RIAC will make an appointment to visit your home prior to placing a guest there. Ideally, this staff person will meet everyone in the household and see the accommodations being offered. The appointment provides an opportunity for IM or RIAC staff to check that prospective hosts have

thought through what hosting might be like, and for hosts to ask questions and express hosting preferences.

What will the orientation be like?

We are planning for 4 hours of orientation, at least part of which will be in person. Topics include: Logistics of hosting, Who are IM and RIAC, Who are our guests, Cultural orientation, Trauma awareness, Boundaries & expectations, and more. Orientation will include a visit to RIAC's offices in Boston.

Once a guest has arrived, what kind of follow up can I expect?

During your time as host, an IM staff member will follow up with you weekly. The first few weeks we will set up a call; at some point we may transition to another check-in format like text or email, once things are running smoothly. Additionally, IM staff will facilitate a monthly virtual host support group where hosts can share their experiences, learn from and support one another. If you have questions in between these points of contact you can always reach out to IM staff.

I don't identify with the Christian faith. Can I host?

Absolutely. We need the generosity of hosts from all backgrounds! This is a moment for the Greater Boston community to come together in support of arrivals from Afghanistan.

At the same time, we are intentionally setting up this small host cohort because we're keenly aware that people who claim to follow Jesus have not always been the most welcoming to immigrants. Some self-professed Christians have done profound harm in the name of religion. Others of us come from a place of wanting to help, but we still can do harm without meaning to. We know we have work to do within our own circle to better represent the life and message of Jesus. We will be integrating that posture and theology into the fabric of our host supports, as well as Christian practices such as prayer and Bible reading. If as someone of a different faith or no faith you still feel drawn to the cohort, please contact Sarah

Blumenshine, IM Director (sblumenshine@egc.org) to talk more about your interest.

Outside the scope of this cohort, RIAC is still in need of host homes and volunteers. You can reach out to Maka Osman, Co-Founder at mosman@riacboston.org to be added to her list. Holly Clark at Catholic Charities (holly_clark@ccab.org) is also looking for hosts and volunteers, and will be walking volunteers through a non-faith-based orientation process.

What happens if things go wrong?

It is highly likely that there will be some small-to-medium tensions during every home stay. This would likely be true even if we were hosting extended family for 2-3 months! However, in a family you have shared history, norms, culture and expectations to fall back upon. Misunderstandings are even more common when navigating cross-cultural relationships.

If the guest or the host is unhappy, IM and RIAC staff are there to help. This could be as simple as a coaching conversation by phone for host and/or guest. For a larger issue it could involve an in-person dialogue to work toward mutual understanding and resolution. Conflict can be uncomfortable, but it also can lead to real learning and growth. IM's posture will always be one of curiosity, concern, encouragement and support. In the rare case of an irresolvable issue, IM and RIAC will work together to find another arrangement for a guest as quickly and smoothly as possible for all involved.

If I decide not to host, is there anything else I can do to help?

Absolutely. Not everyone can host, and we also need volunteer support with food shopping, transportation, and connecting guests to other resources they need for their journey. Of course, funding to support our work and to help with cash assistance for guests is always needed. You can go to egc.org/give and write in "Afghan Relief" for 100% of your gift to go to Afghan arrivals; or write in "IM" for your gift to go toward building the training and structures that support this initiative.

Questions?

Please contact Sarah Blumenshine, IM Director at sblumenshine@egc.org.