

# IRC Atlanta Case Study: Mobile COVID-19 Testing

## About IRC Atlanta

The IRC in Atlanta is the largest refugee resettlement agency in Georgia. Since opening in 1979, they have welcomed more than 26,500 refugees from 67 countries to rebuild their lives in communities across the state. Forced to switch to remote working in March 2020, the IRC in Atlanta has continued to provide core programming—including resettlement and case management services, youth and adult education classes, employment assistance, and immigration services—and in addition, has expanded services to include large-scale, mobile COVID-19 testing, ongoing delivery of food boxes, and the disbursement of emergency cash assistance, including CARES Act funding, to community members impacted by the pandemic.

## Key Partners

- [DeKalb County Board of Health](#): Works to protect and improve the health of all in DeKalb County, which represents a diverse community stretching across rural, suburban and urban areas; and “more than 660,000 residents represent more ethnic groups than any other county in the southeastern United States.”
- [CORE \(Community Organized Relief Effort\)](#): Founded by actor Sean Penn and Ann Lee, CORE is working with local organizations across Georgia and the U.S. to provide much-needed access to COVID-19 testing and relief.

## Promising practices in COVID-19 mitigation and prevention efforts

### Mobile testing

The IRC in Atlanta is partnering with [CORE Response](#) and the [DeKalb County Board of Health](#) to bring free, mobile Drive-Thru and Walk-Up COVID-19 Testing to Clarkston and the surrounding



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central DeKalb County area. Clarkston—known as the Ellis Island of the South—has been a first home to many newly-arriving refugees for decades.

Over 51 days of mobile COVID-19 testing between September and December 2020, the IRC-CORE team of former refugees—now green card holders and naturalized U.S. citizens—provided access to an incredible **10275** self-administered tests, with interpretation available in more than 20 languages. This team has also provided **148** flu vaccinations in partnership with the DeKalb County Board of Health. (6 days, 3 sites, 27 hours during November and December)

The mobile testing unit provides tests from 10am-4pm, Thu-Sat, at rotating locations and has been graciously hosted by several Clarkston apartment complexes, the Clarkston Campus of [Georgia State University's - Perimeter College](#), local places of worship, and local non-profits, like [Clarkston Community Center](#) and [Friends of Refugees](#). It has been a true community-wide effort to provide these 6,000+ tests. The pre-Thanksgiving IRC-CORE testing site at Clarkston Community Center saw a record number of 916 tests in two days—and 60 flu shots.

## Food Distribution

As soon as the pandemic hit Georgia in March, the IRC in Atlanta's New Roots and Logistics programs began to partner on weekly food distribution for refugee families who had lost income and/or employment, and individuals who had tested positive for COVID-19 and were self-isolating at home. Between March and December, IRC staff delivered **514 Food Boxes** to families—more than 10,500lbs of food. Often Food Boxes contained produce from Clarkston school gardens, grown by high school and elementary students enrolled in the IRC's New Roots programming.

In lieu of their annual Thanksgiving Feast for newly arrived refugee families, the IRC in Atlanta and partners at Memorial Drive Ministries hosted a contactless Food Drive to provide food boxes to Clarkston families in time for Thanksgiving. Thanks to generous donations from community members, they were able to assemble and distribute more than **140 Thanksgiving Food Boxes** full of cooking essentials, pantry staples and storage produce.



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## Direct assistance

The IRC in Atlanta also disbursed more than \$453,000 in direct cash assistance to community members impacted by COVID-19 for rent, mortgage, utilities, childcare, medical expenses and grocery items between March and November 2020. While they primarily serve DeKalb County community members—including refugees, immigrants and native-born Americans—their support is available to all in need. This cash assistance helps individuals to be able to stay at home if necessary following a positive test or exposure to someone testing positive.

## Partner Roles in Mobile Testing

### CORE

- Provides any and all supplies and equipment needed (e.g., disinfectant, generator, portable power bank, tablets, WiFi hotspots)
- Helps manage logistics of testing sites (e.g., securing the vehicle and people flows, how to close the area, safety concerns)
- Supports staff's needs by providing heaters and hand warmers, areas for staff to rest, port-a-potties, lunch and water everyday
- Recruitment, hire and train the diverse team of 18 testers and interpreters from the community (in conjunction with IRC)
- Creation, translation and distribution of culturally and linguistically appropriate materials around testing
- Facilitates additional resources at COVID-19 testing sites, such as influenza vaccinations
- Educational materials about tests and COVID-19

### DeKalb County Board of Health

- Provides IT support and access to IT system for tracking testing
- Provides PCR tests to be used at testing sites
- Provides limited PPE



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- Advice regarding SARS-CoV-2 hot spots and zip codes to host mobile test sites
- Helps manage logistics of testing sites
- Contact information and 24/7 easy access for partners in case of emergencies

## IRC Atlanta

- Recruitment, hire and train the diverse team of 18 testers and interpreters from the community (in conjunction with CORE)
- Determine the locations for the mobile testing sites
- Logo and branding (and trust from communities)
- Help manage logistics of testing sites (e.g., securing the vehicle and people flows, how to close the area, safety concerns)
- Connections and brokering relationships with areas to conduct testing (for example, apartment complexes)
- Creation, translation and distribution of culturally and linguistically appropriate materials around testing
- Advertisement of testing sites
- Educational materials about tests and COVID-19

## Keys to Success and Overcoming Challenges

1. **RIM leadership:** A previously resettled refugee with a medical background and strong community ties leads the work, dually employed by IRC and CORE. Dr. Omar Aziz was resettled to the US in 2013; began working at IRC in 2015; and leverages his connections to make mobile testing a success.
2. **Overcoming stigma about the test:** the day before testing at a site, the IRC-CORE partnership conducts community outreach. They translate all educational materials about the test and pandemic, and hand out the information in addition to masks, in the communities around the site.



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3. **Using IRC logo:** The IRC has a big truck with its logo on it, which is strategically placed at every testing site in a very visible area along with other IRC and partner signage as needed. This makes it easier for their partners to go to these areas, because of the trust RIM communities have in the IRC.
4. **Use of public health department's IT system:** IRC-CORE staff use the Dekalb County Board of Health's system to track testing. The health department's IT manager is on call to help with any issues and works closely with them including letting them know about any updates or what they need to be aware of.
5. **Communication:** Dekalb County Board of Health and CORE have provided IRC staff with contact information for emergencies and are available 24/7 to troubleshoot. The IRC director works closely with the CORE director.
6. **Support testing staff:** provide food, water, bathrooms, and training.
7. **Have Chief of Police and city manager contacts:** for when any issues arise and to notify them to be aware of a site and potential for traffic.
8. **Use Google maps:** to plan how to close the area and secure the vehicle and people flows.



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