



# How Rownd streamlined onboarding for tens of thousands of Afghans with Team America Relief

CASE STUDY



*Rownd was instrumental in bridging the gaps between onboarding speed, security, and privacy.*

**Joe Saboe**

**Co-founder, and Board member of Team America Relief**

## Team America Relief (TAR)

Team America Relief is non-profit organization comprised of citizen liaison volunteers (CLVs) who—through their collective knowledge, open-source information, and hard work—support ongoing evacuation efforts in Afghanistan. The organization helped rescue hundreds of Afghans and put thousands more on the path to obtaining a U.S. visa. At its peak, the organization had 250 volunteers.

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## HIGHLIGHTS

### Tech challenges

- Authenticating and verifying Afghans so they can edit or redact their data quickly.
- Building trust with individuals halfway around the world.
- Adding privacy and data controls for added security without slowing down evacuations
- Integrating with Airtable, Slack, and Google Sites
- A team of volunteers without tech backgrounds.

## Challenges

Tens of thousands of Afghans with legitimate U.S. Visa applications were stranded and in danger.

Privacy and flexibility are often trade-offs when it comes to authentication, but for Team America Relief, both were a necessity. The speed at which the ground situation in Afghanistan was changing in 2021 and the need for ongoing, sustained operations created a unique challenge.

Joe Saboe, Founder of Team America, explains:

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*We had to become a beacon of light when everything was falling apart for so many. Afghan refugees had to know that their data was safe—that they could access it—but we could not put a huge burden on them to “login” or “signup” since many were literally fleeing their homes.*

TAR defined success as the ability for Afghans to securely send as much data as possible at a given point in time, but with the option and promise that they can come back in the future to redact, edit, or download their critical documents like copies of passports and ID cards.

Although a high priority, the required engineering effort took this option off the table. It was impossible for the TAR team to build the required technology. Existing government organizations often failed at this. Meanwhile, Afghans were in grave danger waiting for the State Department to process their paperwork.

The Rownd team donated expertise and resources to help save Afghans and protect their data

## Solution

- Rownd authentication platform
- Rownd Airtable integration
- Cloudflare (to inject the Rownd Hub)
- End-to-end authentication
- User access to data

## Results

- **1,500** Afghans rescued
- **60,000** Afghan profiles and personal data protected by Rownd
- **12K+** individual cases
- **1,500+** data redactions
- **3,500+** data edits/downloads
- **TAR becomes the largest repository of Afghan relief data** sent to the State Department—made possible with Rownd



*“Every day the situation would change on the ground. We needed our tech strategy to be very flexible. One of the reasons why non-profits like ours popped up was the gap that was left by rigid systems in government and industry.” – Joe Saboe*

One of the biggest tech hurdles was securely and safely handling thousands of vulnerable individuals' data. Some Afghans were burning their documents, fearing retribution by the Taliban for working with American forces. TAR databases might be the last place on the planet that these documents exist.

Joe commented, *“We wanted to ensure that we gave these refugees the dignity and power to control their data. Everything else was taken from them. We could assure them that they can go in, claim, and manage their data. Rownd gave us that on day one.”*



*“When the last plane took off at the end of August 2021, we knew there would be a lot of fear. We needed to give those in danger the ability at that point to validate their email, claim their account, and turn it off. A 2 AM phone call from an immigration lawyer could kill them.” – Joe Saboe*

Contextual authentication was critical for Team America Relief. It was critical to give Afghan allies the ability to send documents without “signing-in,” but allow them to come back 6 months later to edit them.

*“In retrospect, this challenge was all about speed and data. The more data we got from our Afghan friends, the faster we could help. We needed technology like Airtable, Google, Slack, and Rownd to accomplish that,” says Mr. Saboe.*

TAR comprised many teams. Case managers reviewed Afghan data and created packages compatible with State Department and Department of Defense requirements. Intelligence squads used on-the-ground, unclassified, “open-source” datasets to route allies safely to the airport. Operations members communicated with families with commercial, off-the-shelf (COTS) apps.

Over several months, these teams worked around the clock to save lives. They required dedicated and flexible technology partners to support this essential operation.



“We could not build our own sign-in system. We knew we’d have to rely on COTS solutions and Rownd was essential in our tech strategy.

Rownd saved lives.

– Joe Saboe

# Solution

## Rownd Authentication Platform

While Joe and his team held deep connections in Afghanistan and the U.S. military, they had little technical experience. The Rownd team came in to safeguard Afghan data in its databases, provide connectivity to Airtable, and bring its novel authentication platform to the Team America Relief website. Because the site was hosted on Google Sites, Rownd used Cloudflare to inject the critical authentication components into the Team America Relief website.

*“The Rownd team was phenomenal to work with. They were dedicated from day one,” says Joe. “They went above and beyond, adding new features and helping us mitigate other security issues. They are true experts in security, authentication, and privacy.”*



*“I truly enjoyed working with Rownd. Beyond installing a solution, they helped us look at new tech solutions, strategies, and were a part of making TAR successful.”*

– Joe Saboe.

Rownd also delivered functionality allowing Afghans to claim and manage their data on the fly as so many were hiding or otherwise displaced.

An Afghan can go to the TAR website, click a button, and Rownd verifies their email, checks Airtable, and then delivers a simple experience to see, edit, redact, and download their data. When the user clicks the button, the actual destination is computed dynamically based on data from the user’s Rownd profile. But the technology doesn’t stop there.

Rownd also employs content gating and element tagging from its no-code dashboard to turn simple buttons into powerful authentication elements. TAR’s “data management” pages sit behind a content gate with buttons and text that can be contextually changed depending on the user’s authentication status or other elements from their profile.

Rownd also provides an Airtable connector that performs lookups on and sends updates to Airtable. Users can always view, edit, and redact any of their information from the Rownd Hub.

*“We were so focused on saving lives that it was great to have a team with a bias toward action and just getting the job done,” Joe praised. “We had an impossible task. Rownd helped us tackle it head on with confidence.”*

# Results

## Ongoing commitment

Over the course of a year, the TAR team saved hundreds of Afghans. But the real numbers will be seen in the coming years as thousands of Afghans are still working on their U.S. Visa or refugee advocacy journey with Team America.

Over 60,000 individual Afghans' records—many of them women and children—are spread across 12,000 cases, all protected with Rownd authentication. Additionally, more than 5,000 Afghans have signed in to claim, manage, redact, or edit their data.

TAR can confidently move forward knowing that Rownd shares their commitment to protecting Afghans' personal information and enabling them to maintain control over it.

Joe remarks, *"America made a promise to protect those that helped our military while we were in Afghanistan. We are here to fulfil that promise. Rownd helps us say that with confidence."*



“Rownd is an essential part of our tech stack and the team is second to none.”

— Joe Saboe



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