Rent Reform Demonstration

Guide for Observing and Monitoring Early Implementation

Brief script for HA staff:

Hi, my name is _________, and I represent MDRC, the organization that has worked with HUD and your agency design on the new rent reform program rules and procedures. My goal this week (today) is to understand how the process and information developed for you and your HCV clients is working out. I'd like to sit in on your orientation and a few interviews so that we can understand how the policy is being implemented and provide you with additional assistance, if necessary. After the orientation session and interviews, I would follow-up with you about the cases I observed.

Brief script for participants:

[Observer: Before you start observation of any client-staff session, have the specialist introduce you to the participant and then you can explain the purpose of the study and why you would like to observe the session].

Hello, my name is _________ and I work with MDRC, the research organization that has worked with the housing agency on the new rent rules that will apply to your family. We want to be certain that you receive all the information you need in a clear and understandable way. With your permission, I would like to observe your interview with a housing specialist to get a first-hand understanding of how the recertification process works, and what parts of the program are clear or confusing to you.

<u>Topics</u>

1. **Orientation** (observe scheduled orientation sessions to understand what is explained / communicated to program participants):
   - Does the PHA provide a friendly and positive introduction at the start of the orientation video? How is the space organized for the orientation session?
   - Observe how each key feature of the rent reform rules is discussed by staff.
     - Key features include: three-year recertification cycle; retrospective income; the loss of deductions and how the lower percentage of income charged mediates that loss; safeguards in the program to protect families when income decreases; limitation on the number of interim reductions in rent; changed utility allowance schedules; minimum rent; and hardship remedies.
   - Listen to the Q&A after the orientation video to determine which, if any, features are not immediately clear to participants.

- Listen to the Q&A for questions related to the research / study.
- Listen to the answers provided by PHA during the Q&A to participant questions; determine whether the PHA staff has a solid understand of the program rules (do they answer correctly and completely?).
- Observe clients to determine whether they give any indication of understanding or confusion as various topics are explained.
- Do these observations suggest the need for additional TA or training?

2. **One-on-one meeting with specialist**. Obtain participant permission to observe recertification meeting. During a one-on-one interview with a client:
   - Observe the implementation of the research procedures: completion of the BIF, explanation of the information sheet, gift card for completing research procedures. [Observe the same for a few control group participants.] Observe how staff communicate the content on the information sheet (the data sharing, option to withdraw from the study, for example).
   - Observe whether participant questions are answered clearly, and whether the housing specialist is able to describe the features of the rent policy and answer the questions with a focus on the potential benefits to the new policy.
   - Listen to the interview to determine that the housing specialist is asking for all the information that must be provided and explains the requirements in a way that is understandable to the client. (i.e., documentation required to verify income – for what period, and from what source).
   - In Louisville only, observe explanation and implementation of the Opt-Out process.
   - Do these observations suggest the need for additional TA or training?

3. **Follow-up discussions with specialists/supervisors** (meet with staff to discuss their experience in policy implementation)
   - Ask specialists which, if any, of the rules are easy or difficult to explain. Ask whether additional materials or written Q&A would be helpful. If so, get specific recommendations from the staff.
   - Ask specialists which program features are easy or difficult for participants to understand. Ask what (questions by clients/frustration expressed by clients, etc.) contributed to their opinion.
   - Discuss the ease of use of the computer system for the new income and rent calculation features.

4. **Review records and documentation**

- For a small sample of completed cases/calculations, review:
    - Verification of retrospective income, looking for the correct retrospective period and compliant documentation.
    - Review the calculated retrospective income against the information entered into the computer system.
    - Compare utility allowance entered into computer against the PHA schedule to confirm accuracy
    - Review calculations to determine whether, when applicable, Grace Period rents are implemented.
    - Review calculations to determine whether, when applicable, Hardship rents are recommended or implemented