

Protocol 4

New Rules Group Participant (Head of Household)

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Brief introductory script for HA staff

My name is _____, and I am with MDRC (or Branch Associates / Urban Institute, a research organization working with MDRC], the organization that has worked with HUD and the housing agency on the new rent rules and procedures implemented as part of the Rent Reform demonstration. Thank you for your time – and for agreeing to participate in this interview. My goal today is to learn about your experiences with the new rent policy. I will try to be as brief as possible. The interview today should last about xx minutes. Your participation in this interview is voluntary, and there is no right or wrong answer – we just want to understand your experiences. There are no program consequences (i.e., loss of benefits) for deciding not to participate in the interview, or for deciding not to answer any particular question. Also please note that your name will not be associated with any information you provide.

Would it be okay for me to record so I don't have to take notes while we're talking? I want to let you know that information collected here is never repeated with the name of the respondent in any reports or in any discussions with housing authority staff. This interview will last for about 90 minutes. For your participation in this discussion group you will receive \$30.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Introduction

1. How long have you lived in your current home? How long have you been receiving a voucher from the housing agency?
2. In what month (to the best of your recollection), did you start paying rent based on the rent calculated under the new policy?
3. Are you currently working? Do you work full time or part time? How long have you been in this job?
4. Do you have children in your home?

Knowledge and general reactions

Rent Reform Demonstration

1. How / when did you first learn that you were selected for the housing agency’s new rent program?
2. What was your initial reaction to the policy? Do you still feel the same? [Probe to see if there’s any change in the initial thinking / reaction to the policy]
3. When you first heard about the new policy, what types of questions did you have about it? Were you concerned about being selected to participate in this new policy?

Communication materials / tools

1. Did you get to watch a video about the new rent rules when you attended the Rent Reform study orientation? Was the video useful?
2. Did you receive additional printed information on the new rent rules to take home with you? How have you used that information?
3. Is there other information that might be useful but has not been offered? Such as?
4. In what ways do you think the video and print materials could be made more useful?

Features of the policy

[Interviewer] I’d like to ask about the features of the new rent rules [Use list below. Gauge their understanding of the policy; and what, if any, positive or negative experiences they report.]

Feature	Questions
Rent calculation	The new rent rules looks at income you received in the 12 months prior to recertification to calculate rent. Were you able to provide the housing specialist the required income documents? Was it harder to provide some types of required documentation? Please explain.
Rent payment to landlord	Have you been able to meet your rent obligations? The new rent rules has you paying a portion (all) of your rent to the landlord directly. What, if any, benefit do you see to doing this?
Grace period and Interims	Have you requested – or have you been eligible for – a grace period? What was your rent during the grace period? Have you had an interim recertification since your rent was calculated using the new rent ? What was the reason for the interim (focus on most recent if more than

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	one interim)? How much did your rent change after the interim?
Hardship	<p>Do you know what to do in the event you are faced with a situation and cannot pay rent?</p> <p>Have you requested a hardship remedy? If yes, was your request approved / denied?</p> <p>What remedy was offered? Does the PHA have other housing remedies that could have been offered?</p> <p>Were you satisfied with remedy offered by the PHA? If not, what did you do about it? If respondent did nothing, why not?</p> <p>Where there times when you could have requested a hardship remedy but decided not to? Why was that?</p> <p>Do you know anyone under the same rent rules as you who requested a hardship remedy? What was their experience? Was their request approved?</p>
Simplified utilities	Are you experiencing problems paying your utility bill in full?

1. What are the biggest changes from the existing rent policy to the new one, from your perspective?
2. Are there particular features of the new rent rules that you like?
3. Do you think the new rent rules helps or hurts your family? Please provide some examples?
4. Are there particular features of the new rent rules that you don't like or concern you? What don't you like about the new rent rules?
5. Do you think the new rent rules will affect/has affected decisions you or members of your family make related to:

Work – either going work, working more hours, stopping work, etc.	<p>If yes, in what ways? Probe:</p> <p>How has it changed your views about work?</p> <p>To the best of your knowledge, how has it changed the views of other adults who live with you?</p>
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Rent Reform Demonstration

	<p>You said you work X (take from introduction section):</p> <p>How has your employment status changed after the new rent rules started?</p> <p>How many jobs do you work?</p> <p>Did you start working another job after the new rent rules started? Why?</p> <p>Have the number of hours changed after the new rules started? Did they increase / decrease? Why? [if increase, probe to understand if the change in the rent rules – keeping the additional income – encouraged respondent to take on additional hours.</p>
Where you live – neighborhood options	If yes, in what ways?
Who lives with you	If yes, in what ways?

Supports to take advantage of the work incentive

Are you looking for work or looking for another / better job?

1. Are there resources you can access to help support your employment efforts?
2. Are you enrolled in or aware of employment-related services that might benefit you?
3. What's the job market like these days? [Try to understand: Have they given up on the job market because they've tried and have not succeeded?]
4. What types of job openings do you find? Have you applied for a job? What happened? [Probe to understand if they are optimistic about their job search efforts and being able to find a job.]
5. How much do the jobs you apply for pay? Would that amount allow you to cover your needs including rent?
6. Would the jobs you apply for pay enough to cover housing costs without a subsidy?

Material Hardship and Well-being

Now I'd like to ask you a few questions to understand how you and your family are faring.

In the months after the new rent rules started, have you experienced any of the following:	YES / NO/DK / REFUSED
Pay more in rent – experience a rent increase?	

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Did not pay the full amount of the rent?	
Were evicted from your home or apartment for not paying your portion of the rent?	
Did not pay the full amount of the gas, oil, or electricity bills?	
Had service turned off by the gas or electric company, or oil company would not deliver oil?	
Were there times you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed	

In the months after the new rent rules started, how would you rate..?	
Your financial situation	<p>Would you say your financial situation is better, about the same, or worse than before the change?</p> <p>Probe to understand response.</p>
Your life today?	<p>Would you say your life today is better, about the same, or worse than before the change?</p> <p>Probe to understand response.</p>

[Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions for me? Provide gift card and request a signature on sign-in sheet]