

Protocol 3

Managers and Supervisors Overseeing the Implementation of the Rent Reform Demonstration

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Introductory script

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 your agency on the new rent rules and procedures. Thank you for your time. My goal during this meeting is to understand how the Rent Reform demonstration is being implemented. I am interested in understanding your perspective on the experiences of staff, households, landlords, and other key stakeholders. I will have questions about the new and current rent rules and operations.

Thank you for your time. I (we) know that you are busy and will try to be as brief as possible. The interview today should last about 90 minutes. This interview is not part of an audit or a compliance review. We are interested in learning about your experiences. There is no right or wrong answer.

Finally, I would like you to know that your name and identity will not be released on any reports. Would it be okay for me to record so I don't have to take notes while we're talking? Do you have any questions before we begin?

Introduction

1. What is your title?
2. How long have you been working at [INSERT PHA]?
3. What is your role at the housing authority?
4. How long have you been involved with the demonstration? In what capacity?
5. Do you supervise staff /specialists working on the demonstration? How many do you supervise?

Staffing and caseload

1. Please confirm:
 - a. Number of staff assigned to work with study families
 - i. Number assigned to work with New Rent Rules households

- ii. Number assigned to work with Existing Rent Rules households
 - b. Total number of households each housing specialist is working with.
 - c. Average caseload for specialists working with:
 - i. New Rent Rules group
 - ii. Existing Rent Rules group
2. Has the HA used “overtime” at any point so far for work related to the demonstration? What types of activities have required overtime pay?

Implementation

1. The new rent policy uses a 12-month look-back period to calculate past income. Have staff experienced issues using the 12-month look back period for calculating income?
 - a. What types of issues have come up?
 - b. What was the most common issue/problem for households?
 - c. Did the documentation requirements pose particular problems? How were they handled?
 - d. Any new types of problems verifying income for those in the new rent rules? How were they resolved?
 - e. For the most part were households able to provide the require information to have rent calculated?
2. On average, how much time would you say your staff are spending on the following recertification activities per household recertification?

Activity	Time [try to get an estimate of hours per household certification]
Recertification meeting, excluding research procedures (i.e., study orientation / video, reviewing the study information sheet, completing the BIF)	
Income verification	
Following up with households about incomplete or missing information	
Determining the utility allowance	
Add other recertification activities identified by the specialist?	

3. Overall, how does the amount of time staff spend certifying households in the new rent rules group compare with the time staff would have spent on the recertification process with families receiving the existing rules?

Activity	Spend (1) a lot more; (2) a little more; (3) about the same; (4) a little less; or (5) a lot less time to perform these tasks under new rent rules.	If more, which part of the process is more time consuming? If less time: where are the biggest time savings? If about the same: why do you think there's been no change?
Recertification meeting, excluding research procedures	<i>Comparison not applicable for sites that used mail-ins prior to the study</i>	<i>Comparison not applicable for sites that used mail-ins prior to the study</i>
Income verification		
Following up with households to collect incomplete or missing information		
Determining the utility allowance		
Other activities related to recertification?		

4. [In case question 3 needs additional probes] How would you assess staff burden for the new rent rules and existing rules groups? Is implementing one set of rent rules more demanding on staff time? If so, what aspects of the new rent rules are more time-intensive or burdensome?

5. Overall, compared to the existing rules, is the new rent rules simpler or more complicated to administer? Why?

- a. Do complexities of retrospective income and safeguards offset other simplifications?

Grace period

1. What is the agency's grace period policy?
 - a. When is a grace period available to households?
 - b. How do they qualify for a grace period?
 - c. What's the length of the grace period?
 - d. How is rent determined for the grace period?
2. How do/will families know they are eligible for a grace period?
3. How do/will families know their grace period is ending?
4. Have there been an issues implementing this feature of the policy? Describe.

Hardship policy, requests, review, and remedies

1. How is the hardship policy for the new rent rules group different from the policy for the existing rules group? In what ways is it similar?
2. Are you seeing more, less, or similar levels of hardship requests for the new rent rules group (compared with the existing rent rules group)?
3. Are you seeing different reasons for hardship requests across the two groups?
4. Are certain types of families requesting hardship requests?

Interims

1. What is the volume of interim requests for the new rent rules group compared with the existing rules group?
 - a. Is the volume higher/lower than expected for the new rent rules group?
2. Is the amount of denials similar across both groups, or higher in one of the groups?
3. Do you track interim requests that are denied? If so, how?

Start-up experiences

1. [SKIP FOR DCHA] Has the process of random assignment gone smoothly or have there been any problems? If so, what types of problems?
2. Do households understand that they were randomly assigned to their study group? Do they see random assignment as fair?
3. Was the training provided at the beginning of the demonstration sufficient for housing specialists to feel comfortable using the modified MIS system? If not, what additional support was needed?
4. [DCHA and LHA] Did changing households' recertification dates to meet the target enrollment schedule cause any complications? If so, what type of issues did it cause?

Staff understanding of the New Rent Rules

1. Are there aspects of the new rent rules that have been easier / harder for staff to understand?
 - a. Please provide examples of each.
 - b. Are there particular training needs? How are they being addressed?
2. How did staff initially react to new rent rules? Where there particular elements of the new rent rules they were reacting to?
3. What are their current reactions to the new policy? The same, more positive, more negative? What aspects continue to evoke negative or positive reactions?

Quality Control

1. Please describe the quality control process used by the HA.

- a. What types of errors / issues are being detected in QC? What are the most common issues you found?
- b. How is the HA handling these issues? What, if any, adjustments are being made to process, data collection, reporting, other?

Landlords' reactions

1. From your perspective, how are landlords reacting to the new rent rules related to tenant minimum rent to landlord?
2. Are you hearing questions, comments, or issues directly from landlords or via staff?
 - a. What types of issues or concerns are being raised by landlords? Are some types of concerns more likely to come up?
 - b. Are they reporting that households are having difficulty meeting their obligations? Are they reporting disputes with tenants over their rent obligations?
 - c. Are their concerns growing over time, or have they levelled off?
 - d. Can you tell if the professional property management companies are reacting differently from the independent landlords (that rent a few units)? How are their concerns different?
 - e. Are you hearing anything positive from landlords? Can you provide some examples that reflect the range of positive reactions?
3. How does the housing agency address / respond to the landlords' complaint reports around rent obligations? Who is responsible for handling landlord concerns?
4. Overall, do the reports suggest dissatisfaction among landlords or do they prefer to have a direct financial relationship with households?
5. Overall, would you say the level of complaints from landlords renting to families in the New Rules group is about the same, more, or less to those renting to families in the Existing Rules group?

Reactions of other stakeholders in the community

1. Are you having to respond to – or address – questions or comments from other stakeholders in the community?
 - a. What types of issues are coming up, and from whom?
 - b. Are these typical queries or unique to the Rent Reform demonstration?
2. Is there any HA-initiated dissemination or outreach to community groups, partners, or other agencies in the community?
3. Following the start of enrollment, have there been media inquiries about this demonstration? Is the housing authority spending about the same, more, or less time on managing media inquiries related to this demonstration?
4. Do you get calls from other agency employees (TANF, Child Support, for example) about the program being administered? Calls from local HUD office?

Working with agency stakeholders to help implement aspects of the new rent policy

1. The demonstration requires verification of 12-months of past income. Have the income verification needs required any special negotiations with data providers or agency stakeholders? Any new coordination or collaboration challenges created for the housing agency? Please describe how these are being addressed / resolved.

Operating dual systems

1. The demonstration requires the housing agency to operate dual rent systems – one for the New Rent Rules group and another for the Existing Rent Rules group. From your perspective, describe your agency's approach to ensuring both sets of policies are properly implemented.
 - a. Staffing decisions
 - b. Quality control decisions
 - c. Management and supervision
 - d. Training (for new rules)
 - e. Other
2. Finally, as manager/supervisor, are there other new rules implementation experiences or challenges you want to share with us?