

Appendix B: Landlord Interview Protocol

Phase 2 Landlord Interview Protocol

INTRODUCTORY SCRIPT

Note that the protocol will be notated and updated to reflect any site-specific considerations (e.g. commonly used terms identified in preparatory conversations with PHAs before the site visits)

As I mentioned over the phone, I'm _____ from Quadel Consulting working on an Abt Associates research team. We're conducting a research study for the Department of Housing and Urban Development on their Small Area Fair Market Rent policy. We're interested in learning what it's like to be a landlord and work with the housing authority. We've found that a lot of folks talk to tenants, but the landlord perspective is usually overlooked. So we want to learn about your work. We're focusing on how the Small Area Fair Market Rent policy has affected you, but also what it's like for you to work with the housing authority and renting in general.

This is more of an informal conversation than a formal interview. We have been hired to provide an independent research perspective. The [name of PHA] provided us with the contact information for 50 landlords in the [City], and you are one of five that we will be talking to for the study. After we talk to all five of the landlords, we will combine everyone's perspectives into a research report that we will send to HUD that may become available for the general public to read. We may include short quotes or summaries of individual comments from our conversations with landlords, but nothing you say will be attached to your name, your company, or your personal information directly. The [name of PHA] does not know which landlords we are interviewing. We hope to get your unfiltered on-the-ground perspective, so your comments will be anonymous and this conversation will be confidential.

I would like to record our conversation because I don't want to take many notes during the interview. This way, I can really concentrate on what you have to say. If you want me to turn the recorder off for any reason or at any time, just say so. No one will hear the recording except for the research team and the assistant who transcribes it. Then, we will erase it. We will take out your name and any other identifying information from the transcript.

Is it okay if I start recording now? [Get verbal consent].

A. Background

A1. How long have you been in the rental property business? How did you get into it?

A2. Tell me about the properties you own or manage.

Probes: All properties

How many properties/units do you own/manage?

Where are they?

Tell me all about the buildings (structure, size, quality, condition, number of units)

Tell me all about the locations (neighborhood, neighborhood reputation, proximity to amenities, demographics of neighborhood)

A3. Tell me about your tenants. How do you usually find tenants?

PROBES: marketing strategy, screening, rejections, applications

A4. [Interviewer, ask if not already discussed:] Do you currently or have you in the past rented to people with Housing Choice Vouchers (sometimes known as Section 8 or housing vouchers)?

Interviewer: *Determine which term landlord is familiar with and use throughout.*

Interview: *If Yes (currently or formerly had HCV holder tenant), continue with A5; if No, then skip to Section B.*

A5. How many units (if any) do you currently rent to Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher holders? About what percentage of all your units does this represent?

A6. Tell me about your thinking when you first decided to accept a Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher holder as a tenant. What went in to that decision?

Probes:

When did that happen (e.g., how long have you been participating in Section 8 / Housing Choice Voucher program)? Was this a result of PHA outreach? If so, what was effective about this PHA recruitment/outreach effort? Could this effort have been improved?

If not, what prompted this? Was it a new tenant approaching you? Or an existing tenant asking you to rent with a voucher?

A7. Do you market specifically to Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher holder tenants? What do you do differently when marketing to voucher holders?

A8. What about the physical unit? What types of characteristics make a unit attractive to Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher holders? Do you do certain types of renovations or advertise particular units or types of units if you're targeting voucher holders?

A9. How hard is it to get a Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher holder tenant? Do they have a lot of choice in your market?

A10. Tell me about Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher holder tenants. How are they different from market rate tenants? What are the advantages and disadvantages of renting to voucher holders?

Probes: behavior, upkeep, length of tenure; assurance that you will get the rent on time, government intervention, tenants, bureaucracy, inspections

B. Understanding of SAFMRs

B1. The [fill in PHA name] sets a payment standard every year that helps determine the maximum amount a housing choice voucher will pay for rent. Before 2011/2013, there was basically one payment standard for each apartment size (by number of bedrooms) for all of [City], with limited exceptions. In 2011/2013, [fill in PHA Name] started to set payment standards based on ZIP Codes. What's your understanding about this change in policy (e.g., that there are now different payment standards for different areas)?

B2. If you knew about this change, how did you learn about it? Did the [fill in PHA name] notify you? How were you notified? Was the notification clear? How did you deal with questions you had about the new payment standards?

Interviewer: if landlord was aware of change in payment standards ask B3, otherwise skip to B4

B3. What did [fill in PHA name] explain to you about the purpose of the change in payment standards? What is your understanding of the intention of the ZIP Code-based payment standards (e.g., to ensure that voucher holders have access to units in a broader range of neighborhoods, including neighborhoods with high-performing schools, low crime rates, and other important amenities)?

Interviewer: if landlord is not familiar with payment standards, skip to section C

B4. How well do the [fill in PHA name] payment standards reflect the market? Are there some types of neighborhoods where the payment standards correctly reflect the market and others where they do not? In what types of neighborhoods do the payment standards correctly reflect the market? In what types of neighborhoods do payment standards not reflect the market? Are payment standards too high or too low in these neighborhoods?

C. Satisfaction with HCV Program

Now I want to switch gears a little and get your perspective of the Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher program in general.

C1. PARTICIPATING LANDLORDS: Tell me about your experience with the Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher program.

Probes: How satisfied are you with the Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher holder program? What are the major positives and negatives of the program? How have SAFMRs/the change in payment standards affected your interest in the program? How has your satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the program changed over the last several years? [SKIP TO D2]

C2. NON-PARTICIPATING LANDLORDS: Tell me what you know about the Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher holder program.

Probes: what kind of landlords, tenants, and rental units is the program for? What are the potential positives and negatives of the program from a landlord's perspective? What factors would determine whether a landlord marketed to HCV holders or accepted HCVs? Have you considered marketing to Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher holder tenants? Tell me more about that.

C3. NON-PARTICIPATING LANDLORDS: Have you considered marketing to tenants with Section 8/Housing Choice vouchers? Tell me more about that.

Probes: Have you made a decision not to lease to Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher holders or have you simply not been asked to do so? If you have not yet been asked to participate, would you consider doing so? If not, why not? What changes would be needed to encourage you to do so?

C4. NON-PARTICIPATING LANDLORDS: Have you had any interactions with [PHA name] or gotten any outreach from them regarding the Housing Choice Voucher program? Could improvements to the PHA's recruitment/outreach efforts change whether you marketed to or agreed to rent to tenants with a Housing Choice Voucher? If so, what changes would be necessary?

D. Impact of Changing Payment Standards

D1. NON-PARTICIPATING LANDLORDS: Under the new policy of the [fill in name of PHA], the maximum rent subsidy will vary from one part of the city to another. In areas with higher rents, the PHA will provide a higher rent subsidy and in areas with lower rents, the PHA will provide a lower rent subsidy. The purpose of this change is to ensure the rent subsidies more closely match local market conditions. Tell me about how this change might influence whether or not you market or rent to Housing Choice Voucher tenants?

Interviewer: the rest of this section will only be relevant for participating landlords

D2. What happened (if anything) when [name of PHA] started using new payment standards? Did you have units where the payment standard went up? Where the payment standard went down? What share of units/how many units are in ZIP codes where payment standards went up? Where payment standards went down?

D3. For landlords with units in ZIP Codes where payment standards went down: What happened to units you own/manage in ZIP Codes where payment standards went down?

Probes: Did the new payment standard fall below the rent you were charging (or would have charged if you were planning to raise the rent)? How have you responded to these declines? For units occupied by HCV holders that have been affected (have had their 2nd annual reexamination); what action(s) did you take (e.g., maintain or reduce the contract rent, change responsibilities for utilities or other costs, notify the tenant of intent to take units out of HCV program for business reasons)?

D4. For landlords with units in ZIP Codes where payment standards went up: What happened to properties you own/manage in ZIP Codes where payment standards went up?

Probes: Was it easier to find renters? Did you add units to the Housing Choice Voucher program in response to increasing payment standards? Did you change/increase your marketing to Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher holders? Were there any other effects of increasing payment standards on your business? How did it affect the rents you charge?

D5. Have you ever made any rent concessions (e.g., charged what you consider below-market rents) for voucher holders? How often? For what reasons?

Probe: Were these concessions different from those offered to other renters, and if so in what way?

D6. As you probably know, even if the applicable rent falls below the payment standard, the PHA is required to determine if the actual rent being charged is reasonable. These decisions are called “rent reasonableness determinations.” Do you think the rent reasonableness determinations the PHA has made are generally fair and reflective of market conditions? Why or why not? For units where you believe the PHA’s rent reasonableness determination is not reflective of the market, how do you generally respond (e.g., did this change your decision to rent to a particular household or participate in the program)?

D7. Do you plan to continue to accept Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher holders as tenants for any units? If not, why not? If so, which units? All the units you own/manage, or some of them? How do you determine which units to rent to HCV holders?

E. Conclusion

E1. Is there anything else about being a landlord in [City], working with [PHA], or your experience with the Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher program that you think we should know for our research study?

Thank you for your time and participation.