

Rent Reform Demonstration

Protocol 2

Housing Specialists Working With Existing Rent Rules Group

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 new rent rules and procedures. My goal during this meeting is to understand how the housing authority's current – or existing - rent policy is being implemented.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. 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.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary, and I would like you to know that your name and identity will not be released on any reports or in any discussions with supervisors or colleagues at the housing authority.

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 and staff background

1. What is your title?
2. How long have you been working at [INSERT PHA]?
3. How long have you been certifying households at PHA?
4. Are you working with households assigned to the Existing Rent Rules group? How long have you been working with these families?
5. Do you have a fixed caseload?

Rent calculation

[For specialists that have a mix of program and control group households, make clear that all following questions refer to the control group households in the study.]

1. Since the demonstration launched at PHA [in **x**], how many families have you recertified under the existing rent rules?

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2. I'd like to understand the types of issues that come up during recertification. Starting at a very broad level:
 - a. What types of issues have come up for you? For households?
 - b. What was the most common issue/problem for households?
 - c. What were some of the more challenging cases you had to deal with? Can you provide a few examples?
3. Overall, thinking about the cases you processed in the last **x**, would you say most/some/all families were able to provide documents necessary for calculating income?
4. Were there particular types of households who were more likely to have difficulty meeting the documentation requirements? Can you provide a few examples?
5. Were the documentation requirements more difficult for particular types of income sources?
6. What part of the existing rent rules are the hardest to understand or that you find you have to explain repeatedly to households?
7. Are there particular types of households that have problems understanding the deductions? Do these households share common characteristics?
8. Thinking about income verification, were there particular income sources that were more difficult to verify? Can you provide a few examples? How did you verify those sources?
9. On average, how much time would you say you're 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?	

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Interims

1. In the period since the Rent Reform demonstration started, have you received any requests for interims?
 - a. What were the reasons for the request?
 - b. On average, how many interims do you process in **x** month?
 - c. On average, how long does it take to complete an interim?
 - i. What aspects of the interim process are time-consuming?
2. Are there particular types of households that request interim recertifications? Do they share common characteristics?
 - a. What are the reasons for requesting interims?
3. Do you get a lot of interim requests that are denied? What are common reasons for denial?
4. Do you know if families are hesitant to request interims? Why so?

Hardship policy, requests, review, and remedies

Application and review

1. Since the start of the demo, have you received any hardship requests?
 - a. If possible, can you recall how many requests you have received last month?
 - b. Is this an unusually high, low, or typical number of hardship requests?
 - c. Does this number represent a small / large portion of your cases in the new rent rules group?
2. Can you walk us through the application and request process? [Probe: What's the first step? What happens next?]
 - a. What documentation do households have to provide to demonstrate hardship?
 - b. Is there a verification process? What? On average, how long does that take?
3. What is the review process for hardship requests?
 - a. Who is involved in the review and decision-making process – how many staff and at what levels?
 - b. Do you have the authority to make hardship remedy decisions? What types of requests can you approve?
4. On average, how long does it take for the PHA to process and make a decision (approve or deny) a hardship request?
 - a. Is the process longer for some types of requests? Please explain?
5. How is the household informed about the housing authority's decision?
6. Is there a limit on the number of hardship requests that will be considered for any household?

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7. To your knowledge, are most hardship requests approved? If not, please provide examples of the types of cases that get denied.

Remedies

1. What is your understanding of the types of hardship remedies that can be offered to families?
2. Do you think families are aware of these remedies?
3. How are decisions made about which remedy to offer?
4. How quickly does the remedy go into effect?
5. What are the reporting requirements for households during the “hardship” phase?

Landlord responses

1. As part of your work at the housing authority, do you interact with landlords? If not, who at the agency interacts with landlords around issues related to tenant rent?
2. If yes:
 - a. What types of issues or concerns do they raise? 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?
3. How does the housing agency address / respond to the landlords’ complaint reports around rent obligations?

Households’ circumstances and hardship experiences

1. Are you hearing reports of negative circumstances or outcomes for families under the existing rent rules? [Probe, if necessary: For example, I’m thinking about hardships like evictions, homelessness, rent arrears, and other situations that affect the household’s well-being?]
2. What types of hardship experiences are being reported to you by households in the Existing Rules group – or by staff working with households in this group?