

INSTRUMENT 7: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR OPPORTUNITY AREA LANDLORDS

Evaluation of the Housing Choice Voucher Mobility Demonstration

This interview guide is intended for landlords, property owners or property managers, who have units in opportunity areas and who have interacted with mobility services staff and who may or may not have previous experience with the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program.

CONSENT

Before we begin, I want to tell you a few things about this study and your participation in it. If you would like translated materials, or to complete the survey in language other than English, please let us know and we will try to accommodate you. If you need information to be presented in an accessible format, for example, Braille, audio, large type, or sign language interpreters, or need a reasonable accommodation (a change or adjustment) so that you can participate, please let us know. Please feel free to ask me any questions you might have. We will also [email/give] you a copy of this information.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) hired a research team to conduct a study on HUD's Housing Choice Voucher Mobility Demonstration (Demonstration) program. The research team is led by Abt Associates and includes the Urban Institute, MEF Associates, Sage Computing, Social Policy Research Associates, a team of consultants, and other researchers that may be added in the future. The purpose of the study is to determine whether and to what extent mobility services are effective in helping Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) families move to higher-opportunity, lower-poverty neighborhoods.

During this interview, we will ask you questions about what it's like to be a landlord/property manager/owner, and your thoughts on the Demonstration, including questions about your and [your company's] involvement in the Demonstration, your perspective on the Demonstration, and how well the Demonstration meets the needs of participating families. At the end of the interview, you will receive a \$40 gift card. Remember, your participation is voluntary and you can choose not to any question.

We are not evaluating your work as a landlord. As part of this process, we are talking with landlords in this local housing market, representatives from Public Housing Agencies (PHAs), mobility service providers, and households who are participating in the HCVMD. We will be conducting at least two rounds of interviews and we may reach out to you again in a couple of years for an additional interview.

I am required to tell you that the questions in this survey have been reviewed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. This collection of information is voluntary and will be used to evaluate the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's Housing Choice Voucher Mobility Demonstration. The information requested under this collection is fully protected and kept private possible by law, including 5 U.S.C. 552a (Privacy Act of 1974) and OMB Circular No. A-130.

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 60 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and

a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number and expiration date for this collection are OMB #: XXX-XXXX, Exp: XX/XX/XXXX. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to XX at XXXX@XXX., or by phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

During the interview, one of the researchers will be taking detailed notes, but we will not identify your name in our notes. With your permission, we will audio record the interview to have an accurate record of what is said. We may contact you after the interview to ask for clarification. We will not allow anyone outside the research team to listen to the audio recordings or review the notes we take. We will make every effort to protect your privacy to the extent permitted by law, but if we think you are at risk of physical or emotional harm, we may need to notify someone. Only the people doing the research will see any information that identifies you personally. Themes across all the conversations we are having will be published in a report to HUD. When we write our reports and discuss our findings, the answers you provide during an interview will be combined with answers from many individuals. We never share any information that identifies you or any other respondents by name outside of our research team. However, we may identify the neighborhood your properties are in, and the location could allow an individual to indirectly attribute a statement to you. We make every effort to avoid this, but you should be aware of the possibility.

Do you have any questions about the study or today's discussion? *[Pause for response and address any questions]*

Do you agree to participate? *[Pause for response]*

Are you comfortable with this interview being recorded? *[Pause for response]*

Thank you, we are going to turn on the audio recorder now.

The tape recorder is now on.

Do you have any questions before we continue?

OK, let's start.

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today.

BACKGROUND (ALL RESPONDENTS)

Please tell me about yourself and your work as a property owner/property manager.

1. How long have you been an owner of rental properties/a property manager?
 - a. What led you to get into the property rental business?
2. Tell me about the properties you own/manage now.
 - a. How many rental units do you own/manage?

It sometimes helps if I write down each of your properties and we can talk more about them one at a time:

- b. Where are they located? Probes: city, region, specific neighborhoods
 - c. What types of properties are they? Probes: apartments in duplexes or multifamily homes, single-family homes
3. [*If not property manager*] How should we refer to you? Probes: an investor, a landlord, property owner, etc.

The next questions will help me decide which questions in the guide are relevant to your experience.

4. Do you currently rent to families with housing choice (or Section 8) vouchers?
 - a. [*If no*] Have you rented to voucher/Section 8 tenants in the past?
 - b. [*If yes*] About what percentage/how many of your units are typically occupied by families with a voucher?
 - c. [*If yes*] Are there units that you rent exclusively to voucher tenants? Tell me all about that.
 - d. [*If yes*] Are there units you don't rent to voucher tenants? Tell me all about that.
 - e. Do you participate in any other housing assistance or subsidy programs as a landlord/owner/investor?
5. Do you currently rent to any tenants who participate in [MOBILITY PROGRAM]?
 - a. [*If yes*] How many [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenants do you currently have in your property/properties?
 - b. [*If yes*] About how long have you been renting to [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenants?
 - c. [*If no*] Have you rented to any [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenants in the past?

HCV PROGRAM EXPERIENCE (LANDLORDS WITH HCV EXPERIENCE)

[Ask these questions of landlords who are currently renting to tenants with a Housing Choice Voucher or who have rented to voucher tenants in the past (Q3 or Q3a = "Yes").]

As we mentioned, we're really interested in landlords' experiences with the HCV program, positive and negative, and anything in between.

You said you rent or have rented to voucher tenants. We'd like to learn more about [YOUR/YOUR COMPANY'S] experience with housing voucher programs.

1. Tell me about your experience with and understanding of the Housing Choice Voucher (or "Section 8") program.

- a. We'd like to hear more about how the program sets limits on the amount of rent that can be charged to tenants—what's that process like? Probes: For particular areas? For particular units?
 - b. Tell me about the logistics involved with renting to a tenant with a voucher. Take me through the whole process.
 - i. How about specific rules and regulations that make renting to these tenants different from renting to market-rate tenants?
 - ii. How and when are you paid for units occupied by families with housing vouchers? How is this process different for tenants without a voucher?
 - iii. What have you done or would you do if a tenant doesn't pay their portion? Does this differ for tenants without a voucher?
2. We know that some landlords manage some of their units especially for the voucher program and others don't do it like that. How about you? Do you advertise specifically to tenants with vouchers for some units?
- a. Tell me what makes those units better candidates for a voucher tenant.
 - b. How about units you do not market or rent to voucher tenants? Tell me about that.
Probes: Rent caps, housing location, neighborhood, housing condition?
3. Tell me about your experience renting to voucher tenants.
Probes: Length of tenure, guaranteed rent, behavior, unit upkeep?
- a. Tell me about the advantages of renting to people with vouchers?
Probes: Assurance you will get rent, tenant characteristics, tenants already screened, rent amount paid
 - b. How about any downsides to renting to people with vouchers?
Probes: Government intervention, tenants, bureaucracy, inspections?
4. Has your experience with voucher tenants been different in any way from tenants who do not use vouchers? *[If yes]* Give me an example.
5. *[If rented to standard HCV in the past and does not currently]* You said you used to rent to people with vouchers, but don't now. We would love to know more about this. Tell me what happened.
Probes: Experience with the PHA, rents, tenants, other concerns?

MOBILITY PROGRAM EXPERIENCE (MOBILITY PROGRAM LANDLORDS)

[Ask these questions of landlords who are currently renting to mobility program participants, or who have rented to program participants in the past (Q4 or Q4c = "Yes")]

Let's talk about your experience with [MOBILITY PROGRAM] specifically, and what it is like working with the program.

1. How did you learn about [MOBILITY PROGRAM]? Tell me how you first became aware of the program.

Probes: Learned from a tenant, a mobility services staff member, / PHA staff, word of mouth?

- a. What were your initial impressions of [MOBILITY PROGRAM]?

Probes: Willing to participate, reservations, didn't know the difference with standard HCV?

2. How much do you/your staff interact with [MOBILITY PROGRAM] staff?

Probes: Works closely with mobility staff at different stages of the process (search and application, lease-up, post-move), participates or participated in services for landlords, minimal interactions?

- a. *[If interacts with staff]* Tell me about how you have been in contact with [MOBILITY PROGRAM] staff. What do you interact with them about?

Probes: Information about the voucher, discussions about lease/tenants, inspections, use of any incentives or financial incentives, post-move check-ins?

3. How helpful or useful have you found/did you find the [MOBILITY PROGRAM] to be?
4. Tell us what aspect of the MOBILITY PROGRAM was most helpful to you?
5. Did any of the families who participate in [MOBILITY PROGRAM] prepare a tenant resume or cover letter when they applied for housing that described their background and why they would be a good tenant?

- a. *[If yes]* What did the letters talk about?

Probes: children, credit, eviction history, employment, recovery, the importance of housing for their family goals

- b. *[If yes]* How did the rental resume affect/change your impressions of the tenant (if at all)?
OR How effective was the rental resume?

6. We understand that the [MOBILITY PROGRAM] offers a streamlined housing inspection process. How does that process work?

7. We have heard that the [MOBILITY PROGRAM] provides a signing bonus to owners for signing a lease with a participant. Tell us anything you've heard about that.

- a. *[If yes and landlord has rented to a family in the mobility program]* Have you ever received a signing bonus for participating in the [MOBILITY PROGRAM]? Tell us how that worked.

- b. *[If the landlord has received a sign-up bonus]* How long did the process take to receive the bonus?

- c. *[If the landlord is familiar with the bonus but has not received it yet]* How much is the bonus for (if you know)?

8. *[Ask this question only in markets where paying a holding fee is relatively common.]* We have heard about ‘holding fees’ from some landlords, how do those work?
9. The [MOBILITY PROGRAM] will pay a holding fee to help protect the owner in the event a voucher tenant does not follow through and rent a unit which the owner has agreed to hold for them. Are you familiar with this policy?
 - a. Have you ever requested or received a holding fee for families in the voucher program? Tell us about that.
10. The [MOBILITY PROGRAM] has a damage mitigation fund to help protect owners from damage to the unit. Tell me about any claims you submitted.
 - a. *[If they have used the fund]* Tell me how that process worked.
 - i. Who did you work with?
How long did it take to process?
 - b. *[If they have used it]* How well would you say it worked for you?
11. [MOBILITY PROGRAM] offers families assistance with their security deposit upon request. Tell me about any of your tenants getting security deposits from the MOBILITY PROGRAM. How did that work for you?
12. How do these services/incentives shape your decision to rent or consider renting to families participating in the [MOBILITY PROGRAM]? Tell me more about that.
 - a. Which services/incentives are most appealing? Which are less important to you? Which services are missing that you would find really helpful?
13. *[If landlord rents to standard HCV tenants]* How does the process of leasing up families in [MOBILITY PROGRAM] compare with leasing up /housing voucher families who are not a part of the [MOBILITY PROGRAM]? Tell me more about that.
 - a. What about inspections? How does the process for [MOBILITY PROGRAM] compare with other Section 8 voucher tenants? Is it the same?
 - b. What about dealing with the [PHA/PHAs]? How does that process differ for [MOBILITY PROGRAM]?

EXPERIENCE WITH MOBILITY PROGRAM TENANTS (MOBILITY PROGRAM LANDLORDS)

[Ask these questions of landlords who are currently renting to mobility program participants or who have rented to mobility program participants in the past (Q4 or Q4c = “Yes”),]

Next, we would like to learn more about your experience with [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenants.

1. How are your [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenants doing in their units?

Probes: No issues/some issues with behavior, upkeep, length of tenure; training and preparation for tenancy through the program

2. Has there been a time when you had any issues with your [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenant? What happened?
 - a. *[If yes]* How was it resolved?

Probes: Interaction with mobility program staff, the local housing authority, etc.?
 - b. *[If yes]* How did the mobility program or housing authority help resolve it?
3. Have you experienced turnover with any of the families participating in [MOBILITY PROGRAM]?
 - a. *[If yes]* Take me through the whole story of how they left and what happened.
 - b. *[If yes]* What interactions did you have with staff at [MOBILITY PROGRAM] about it?
 - c. *[If yes]* Have you continued renting to families participating in the [MOBILITY PROGRAM] after the initial [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenant left? Tell me more about that.
4. Tell me about the advantages of renting to [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenants? Give me an example.

Probes: Program staff, signing bonus or holding fee, other services or incentives, assurance that you will get the rent on time, government intervention, tenant characteristics?
5. Tell me about the downsides of renting to [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenants?
 - a. Has there been a time when you were frustrated with [MOBILITY PROGRAM]? Can you tell me more about that? What would have helped at that time?

Probes: Program staff, service quality, support and communication, application and approval process, inspections, administrative delays, small area FMRs, tenant damages, leases?
6. Looking forward, would you be willing to rent to more families from [MOBILITY PROGRAM]? Why or why not?
 - a. What would make you more likely to rent to MOBILITY PROGRAM tenants?

PERCEPTIONS OF HCV PROGRAM (LANDLORDS WITH NO HCV PROGRAM EXPERIENCE)

[Ask these questions of landlords who have never rented to tenants who used a Housing Choice Voucher (Q3 and Q3a = “No”).]

You said you’ve never rented to a voucher family. I’d like to know more about your thoughts on the Housing Choice Voucher program so we can learn how to improve it.

1. Have you ever been approached by a potential tenant with a voucher?
 - a. *[If yes]* About how frequently have you been approached by a person with a voucher?
 - b. *[If yes]* Tell me about the last time you were approached by a person with a voucher. How did that go? Why did you end up not renting to them?

Probes: Decided not to participate? Declined to follow-up? Issues related to voucher program (rent cap, inspection process, occupancy?) Issues related to the tenant/family (income, debt/credit, background, deposit issues?)

2. Have you heard that there are any advantages or disadvantages to renting to HCV/Section 8 voucher tenants? Tell me about that.

a. What are the advantages?

Probes: Assurance you will get rent on time, tenant characteristics?

b. What about the disadvantages?

Probes: Tenants, bureaucracy, inspections, lost rent/money while waiting for unit approval?

c. How likely are you to rent to a voucher tenant in the future?

d. What would need to change about the program for you to rent to a voucher tenant, or list your units through the program?

Probes: support for tenant leasing, access to a damage mitigation fund, landlord signing bonus, post-move check-in supports

3. Do you have any concerns about participating in the voucher program?

a. What could be done to alleviate those concerns?

MOBILITY PROGRAM KNOWLEDGE (LANDLORDS WITHOUT MOBILITY PROGRAM EXPERIENCE)

[Ask these questions of landlords who are have never rented to mobility program participants (Q4 and Q4c = “No”)]

1. Has anyone reached out to you to share more information about the [*if applicable*] Housing Choice Voucher program, or talk to you about the [MOBILITY PROGRAM]?

a. [*If yes*] How did they reach out to you? Tell me more about how they contacted you and what they shared about the program.

Probes: Shared information, invited you to attend a training/education session, encouraged you/gave you tools to market your units to voucher tenants, shared information about program incentives for landlords?

2. [*If has been contacted about the program*] How helpful was the information that was shared with you?

a. How did the information affect your interest in renting to program participants?

b. Tell me about any reservations you had with the voucher program that the outreach/interaction did not address.

REFLECTIONS (ALL RESPONDENTS)

For the last couple of questions, I'd like to ask you to reflect overall on your experience with the mobility program.

1. What do you think of the MOBILITY PROGRAM overall? What was shared with you about the goal of the program? What do you think about that?
2. One of the goals of [MOBILITY PROGRAM] is to help families move to safe neighborhoods with good schools that will help them and their children to thrive. What do you think about that?
 - a. *[If MOBILITY PROGRAM landlord]* How do you see your role in achieving it as a landlord participating in the program?
3. *[If MOBILITY PROGRAM landlord]* What do you think is working well with [MOBILITY PROGRAM] so far?
 - a. What do you think could be done to make [MOBILITY PROGRAM] more effective?
4. What could be done to make the regular voucher program more effective?

CLOSING (ALL RESPONDENTS)

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I have just a few more questions.

1. Is there anything that I did not ask about [MOBILITY PROGRAM] or the Housing Choice Voucher program that is important for us to understand?
2. What else should I know about being about being a [LANDLORD/PROPERTY OWNER] in this housing market that is important for us understand?
3. Do you have any final questions for me about the study, or about the research team?

Thank you for your time. We will now turn off the recorder.