Attachment D: Program Director Interview Guide

Housing Choice Voucher and Public Housing Program Directors Working with Alternative Rent Rules Group

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

[Shaded and bracketed text indicates notes for the interviewer]

Research team introductory script

My name is _____, and I am with MDRC, the research organization that is working with HUD and your agency on the alternative rent policies and procedures as part of the Stepped and Tiered Rent Demonstration. Thank you for your time. My goal during this meeting is to understand how the alternative rent policies are being implemented. I am also interested in understanding how households understand and experience the alternative policies and their questions about it.

I (we) know that you are busy and will try to be as brief as possible. The public reporting burden for this interview is estimated to average 90 minutes, including the time for reviewing instructions and completing the interview.

If you have any comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions to reduce this burden, please send them to the Reports Management Officer, Paperwork Reduction Project, to the Office of Information Technology, US. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington, DC 20410-3600. When providing comments, please refer to OMB Approval No. XXXX.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. 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. Additionally, you can refuse to answer any question, and can stop the interview at any time without penalty. We will protect your responses from disclosure. MDRC researchers will not release your name and identity on any reports or in any discussions with supervisors or colleagues at the housing authority.

Do you agree to participate? Would it be okay for me to record so I don't have to take notes while we're talking? (NAME will take notes as backup to the recording.)

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview.

[Interviewer: at start of audio, state date, time, & interview #]

I. INTRODUCTION AND STAFF BACKGROUND

1. What is your job title?
2. How long have you been working at PHA? How long have you been in your current role?
3. In what ways have you been involved in implementing the [alternative rent] policy at PHA?
    a. Please describe your [alternative rent policy]-specific responsibilities.
4. How have your responsibilities related to [alternative rent policy] changed over time?

II. GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF NEW RENT POLICIES

5. What would you say that the housing authority is trying to achieve by adopting [alternative rent policy]?
6. What are biggest advantages of the [alternative rent policy]? Disadvantages?
7. What were some of the most significant changes to PHA operations required to implement the new rent rules?
    a. Possible probes: Were these changes anticipated? Were any surprising? Were any more difficult to implement than others?
8. How do you feel that families will fare under the [alternative rent policy]?
    a. Are there certain types of households that you feel may fare better or worse than others?

III. IMPLEMENTING ALTERNATIVE RENT POLICY RECERTIFICATION

9. The new rent policy uses a 12-month look-back period to calculate retrospective income. What changes, if any, to the income verification processes has your agency implemented in order to adopt retrospective income?
10. How would you say the process of adopting retrospective income has gone at your agency?
    a. Possible probes:
        i. Issues verifying income, such as types of income sources that are harder or easier for staff to verify;
        ii. Issues calculating income, such as confusion over how to treat income sources or allocate income to the retrospective period;
        iii. Issues with household compliance or third-party verification;
        iv. Perceptions about what may be working well or challenges that persist; and
        v. Staffing issues that have resulted from the implementation of retrospective income.
11. Are there any new policy changes or process improvements that your agency has implemented or is considering implementing since the launch of enrollment related to retrospective income verification or calculation?
    a. If yes, ask respondents to describe changes, their rationale, and share perceptions of the results.
12. Has verifying retrospective income under the [alternative rent policy] resulted in changes to how income is verified for other households who are not subject to the [alternative rent policy]?
    a. Possible probe: (If there are changes) Do the changes affect the demonstration's control group?
13. Do you think that training provided to staff on the details of the [alternative rent policy] and the process of recertifying families was sufficient?

     a.   Would any additional supports be useful now? Please describe.

14. Was the training on using PHA software (specify) to implement [alternative rent policy] sufficient?

     a.   Would any additional supports be useful now?

15. Are there any additional modifications to PHA software to support implementation of the [alternative rent policy] that you would recommend at this time? Please describe.

IV. STAKEHOLDER REACTIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

16. Have there been any communications from tenant groups or resident councils or advocacy groups like Legal Aid regarding the alternative rent policies? If so, what were their reactions?

     a.   Has your PHA targeted any particular communications to these groups or other stakeholders about the alternative rent policies? Please describe.

17. Has the Stepped and Tiered Rent Demonstration implementation required new coordination with other government entities, outside of the PHA Board? Please describe.

18. Have you received or been made aware of any communications from landlords or landlord associations regarding the (alternative rent policy)? Please describe.

V. HARDSHIP IMPLEMENTATION

19. Are you aware of any households that have requested hardships after their initial certification under the [alternative rent policy]?

     a.   (If yes) Please tell me more about the nature of hardship requests your agency has received.

     b.   Possible probes: How many? What types? How did the process play out? Outcomes?

20. Are you involved in approving or reviewing hardship requests from families? If yes, how so?

21. Are households subject to the [alternative rent policy] sufficiently aware that they may request hardships and the process for doing so?

22. Are you aware of any types of households experiencing hardship who are not covered by the hardship policies available to households in the [alternative rent policy]? Please describe those families.

23. The housing authority has the ability to provide hardships for "extenuating circumstances." Are there examples of hardships that meet this criterion that your agency has granted?

24. Overall, how well do you feel that the hardship policies are working?

25. Are there any changes to the hardship policies that you might recommend?

VI. STAFFING

26. Do you feel as though staffing levels for [alternative rent policy]-specific tasks are sufficient? Why/why not?

27. Are there particular challenges associated with operating more than one rent policy at your PHA?

28. Are there any challenges related to quality control as a result of implementing [alternative rent policy]?

29. How does your agency conduct quality assurance on the implementation of [the alternative rent policy]?

       a.   Probe for frequency of case reviews / sampling approach.

30. How were staff selected to conduct recertifications under the [alternative rent policy]?

31. Are there certain staff skills or competencies that you feel are necessary for successful implementation of the [alternative rent policy] versus standard policy?

32. Has your PHA experienced turnover in STRD-specific positions?

       a.   (If yes) What factors may have influenced that turnover?

       b.   (If yes) Are vacancies being filled?

VII. DEMONSTRATION PLANNING

33. Looking back, how would you describe the planning phase between your PHA's selection into Cohort #2 and the launch of enrollment into the STRD? Where there any achievements or challenges that stand out? Please describe.

34. Were the supports provided by HUD, MDRC, ICF (a HUD-contracted technical assistance-provider) and other organizations during the planning phase sufficient to meet the needs of preparing for the launch of STRD? [Ask about each group separately.]

       a.   What additional supports, if any, might have been helpful to receive during the planning stage?

35. How has STRD implementation affected the Family Self-Sufficiency program at your PHA?

       a.   (If FSS offerings changed) How has it changed? What led the PHA to adopt these specific changes? How do you feel the implementation of those changes is going?

VIII. OVERALL REFLECTIONS AND WRAP UP

36. What have been the greatest successes of [alternative rent policy] implementation?

37. What have been the greatest challenges of [alternative rent policy] implementation?

38. Looking forward, are there any particular concerns you have about future implementation of [the alternative rent policy]?

39. Is there anything you would recommend changing about any aspects of the [alternative rent policy] that you have not already shared?

40. What measures would you recommend to another PHA that was considering implementing the [alternative rent policy]?

41. Is there anything else that you would like to share that we haven't covered?

42. Do you have any questions for me?