



Evaluation of PHA CARES Act Waivers

FINAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL|CONTRACT #: 86614822F00045

Appendix B – Interview Protocol for Operations Staff at PHAs that
Adopted Waivers

Introduction

Interviewer: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is _____, and I am a researcher with 2M Research (2M), the policy research firm contracted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for this study.

I will start by briefly introducing the study, obtaining consent, and making sure we cover any questions you might have before we begin the interview.

The purpose of this study is to gather information about the background, authorization, and ways in which Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) have used CARES Act waivers to implement strategies to support residents and tenants during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, we would like to understand the successes, challenges, and changes that have resulted from the implementation of these waivers. We will also further explore policy and program implications to understand how discontinuing the waivers offered by the CARES Act may impact PHAs and assisted households moving forward, as well as recommendations for HUD to continue similar waivers offered by the CARES Act.

For this study, we are interviewing stakeholders from 50 PHAs, including 45 PHAs that adopted waivers and five PHAs that declined to adopt any waivers, to understand their reasons for taking this course of action. We have spoken to your PHA leadership about the context and process for the implementation of the waivers your PHA adopted. **For our conversation today, we will therefore focus on the perceived outcomes/impacts associated with the implementation of the waivers on your operations and assisted households. We will also cover any recommendations you may have for improvement, expansion, and sustainability of flexibilities offered by the waivers.**

Our conversation should last approximately 60 minutes.

Permission to Record

Before we begin, we would also like to request your permission to record the conversation to ensure our notes are accurate and complete. We will not share the recording with HUD, and we will delete it at the end of the study.

Do we have your permission to record this interview?

If interviewee(s) agrees to be recorded:

Thank you. Now, I am going to start the recording (**TURN ON RECORDER**). Can you please confirm that you have agreed to be recorded?

If interviewee(s) declines:

Okay, that is not a problem. We will take detailed notes during this conversation to ensure that your views are captured accurately.

Consent to Participate

We hope you will be candid in the information you provide. We will aggregate information about your PHA and comments from stakeholders in our report. We will conduct all analyses using an anonymous (e.g., de-identified) data file and will not share your identity. You can refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may stop at any time. There will be no negative consequences if you choose to stop or if you choose not to participate. We will only use your responses to this interview for research purposes and they will NOT be used for compliance monitoring. Would you still like to participate in the study?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section 1. Respondent Background

I'd like to start by learning a bit more about your role as it relates to the PHA. Can you describe your role at the PHA and your experience with the CARES Act waivers?

Section 2. Context and Background

Next, I'd like to ask a few questions to understand more about the waivers your PHA used and the factors that informed your PHA's decision to adopt a particular waiver.

- We understand the CARES Act waivers your PHA adopted are the following__<Interviewer to read out the waivers> _____. Does this sound correct?
- What initial challenges (e.g., challenges to service provision and the barriers to maintaining normal operations) did your PHA experience as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
Probe for the following examples, if needed:
 - Can you please describe if there were any challenges related to collecting documentation for potential program participants in order to enroll them into federal rental assistance programs?
 - Can you please describe if there were any challenges with your PHA's ability to obtain information related to changes in income or employment?
 - Can you please describe if there were any challenges with your PHA's ability to maintain in-person inspection of units?
 - Can you please describe if there were any challenges with your PHA staff's ability to meet in person with program participants for certain briefings?

Section 3. Perceived Outcomes

I would now like to discuss how the implementation of the CARES Act waivers impacted your PHA's services, operations, and the assisted households you serve.

- Which of the waivers that your PHA adopted and used did you find the most useful for your overall operational effectiveness in serving residents and clients during the pandemic? How were the adopted waivers useful?

[Note to Interviewer: Be prepared to refer respondents to the list of waivers they confirmed their PHAs adopted in Question 1]

- **[Note to Interviewer: Cycle through the probes in this question for each type of waivers that the respondent identified in Question 3]** For the next set of questions in this section, I would like to understand in more detail how each of the CARES Act waivers identified as useful impacted or benefited your PHA's operations and assisted households.
 - a. In your opinion, how did __<Waiver Name> ____ benefit or negatively affect your residents?

Probe for the following examples, if needed:

- How did the waivers affect applicant or assisted households to meet requirements for program?
 - How did the waivers affect assisted households housing situation?
 - How did the waivers affect the time it took to determine income?
 - How did the waivers affect potential households to access federal rental assistance?
 - How did the waivers affect program participant achieving self-sufficiency?
Note to interviewer: Ask if PHA utilized FSS waivers.
 - How did the waivers affect your PHA's ability to serve foster youth ? **Note to interviewer: Ask if PHA utilized FUP waivers.**
 - How did the waivers affect your PHA's ability to serve non-elderly people with disabilities? **Note to interviewer: Ask if PHA utilized Mainstream waivers.**
- b. How did __<Waiver Name> ___ affect your PHAs' ability to provide services for residents?
- How did the waivers affect the time between household application and household receiving assistance?
 - How did the waivers affect the utilization of vouchers and lease-up?
 - How did the waivers affect the success rates for vouchers?
 - How did the waivers affect the ability of landlords to participate in the voucher program?
 - How did the waivers affect PHA staff's ability to provide customer service?
- c. How did __<Waiver Name> ___ help to streamline or improve your PHA's general operations other than service delivery?
- How did the waivers affect supply of affordable housing? **Note to interviewer: Ask if PHA utilized PBV waivers.**
 - How did the waivers affect recertification and other income examination processes? **Note to interviewer: this is related to virtual inspections.**
 - How did the waivers affect evictions (e.g., over-income households in public housing)?
 - How did the waivers affect any requirements for community service? (e.g., Community Service and Self-Sufficiency Requirement Suspension Waiver in Public Housing)
- d. How did __<Waiver Name> ___ change your PHA reporting of administrative data (if at all)?
- How did the related changes (if any) affect your PHA's program and monitoring performance?
- HUD made efforts to continue some of the flexibilities offered by the CARES Act, such as expedited regulatory waivers. Did your PHA submit requests for any of the expedited regulatory waivers?
Probe for the following, if PHA submitted requests:
 - What expedited regulatory waivers did your PHA receive approval for?

- Why did your PHA request these waivers?
 - How did the expedited regulatory waivers affect your PHA’s operations and residents?
 - Were there CARES Act waivers that you believe that HUD should have continued through the expedited regulatory waiver process?
- What other impacts (if any) did the implementation of the CARES Act waivers have on your PHA’s general operations and residents?
 - Did you notice any successes resulting from the waivers offered by the Cares Act? If so, what were they?
 - Did you notice any challenges resulting from the waivers offered by the Cares Act? If so, what were they?
 - Can you describe any lessons learned from the implementation of the waivers?

Section 4. Policy and Program Implications

I would now like to discuss any recommendations you may have for improvement, expansion, and sustainability of regulatory flexibilities available to PHAs.

- Which of the waivers that were offered by the CARES Act would you like to become permanent (if any)?
Probe for the following if the Respondent expressed a desire for the waivers to continue:
 - a. For each of the waivers mentioned, what are the particular reasons for wanting to continue each of those specific waivers?
 - b. How would continuing each of the waivers mentioned benefit your PHA operations or assisted households?
 - c. How would discontinuing the waivers harm PHA operations or assisted households?
- For those CARES Act waivers that you would like to see become permanent, what modifications (if any) would you want made to the waiver for improvement?
- Are there any CARES Act waivers that your PHA did not find to be particularly useful and would not pursue if they were continued through regulatory and statutory changes?
If yes, follow up with:
 - a. Which waivers would you want to discontinue?
 - b. What are your reasons for wanting to discontinue these waivers?

Section 5. Closing

- Is there any other important information that might help us better understand your implementation of the CARES Act waivers, and how it impacted your operations and residents?

- Those are all the questions we have. Is there anything else you'd like to share that we have not asked about?

We would like to thank you for taking time from your busy schedule(s) to speak with us today. Your answers have provided us with valuable insight into the ways you used the CARES Act waivers as well as their subsequent outcomes. Should you have any additional thoughts that you would like to share, please feel free to contact Dr. Hiren Nisar, the study's principal investigator, at hnisar@2mresearch.com or our HUD contact, Justin Brock, at Justin.Brock@hud.gov.
