

PHA Managers/Supervisors/Policy Informants Interview Guide

PHA Managers/Supervisors and/or Policy Informants

Semi-Structured Group 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 all 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 each of you is busy and will try to be as brief as possible. The public reporting burden for this group 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. 2528-0339.

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. MDRC researchers will not release your name and identity in any reports and will not share your responses with colleagues or supervisors at your housing authority or with HUD in such a way that you may be identified.

[Group interview-specific script] I am (we are) interested in each of your perspectives on the questions that I ask. I will do my best to ensure that you each have a chance to speak to a certain question. However, to save time, if one of your colleagues says something you agree with, you may simply say “I agree.” And, if you would like to expand upon or offer as an addition to something that has already been shared, you should feel free to do so.

Finally, if you have questions after the interview, you may contact:

- James Riccio, Study Co-Principal Investigator, james.riccio@mdrc.org
- Nandita Verma, Study Co-Principal Investigator, nandita.verma@mdrc.org
- Nina Castells, Study Project Director, nina.castells@mdrc.org
- Jonathan Bigelow, Implementation Study Lead, jonathan.bigelow@mdrc.org

Does each of you agree to participate?

Would it be okay for me to record this interview so I don't have to take notes while we're talking? (NAME will take notes as backup to the recording.) We will keep any recording and notes in a secure network that only members of the research team may access.

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 #]

[A note to interviewers on facilitating a group interview with housing authority staff: The intended goal of a group interview is to obtain shared reflections on the questions that are posed, rather than to obtain standalone responses to all questions from each respondent. In a group interview dynamic, interviewers are encouraged to rotate the respondent to whom questions are first asked, and then ask if other respondents have additional detail to add or differing perspectives. If respondents do have differing/supplemental response, then a full hearing is encouraged. The goal is a somewhat free-flowing discussion, with responses informed by (but not required from) all respondents.]

I. INTRODUCTION AND STAFF BACKGROUND

1. Please confirm your job title?
2. How long have you been working at PHA? How long have you been in your current role?
3. What are your roles at the [PHA] related to the [alternative rent policy]?
4. How has your engagement with or responsibilities related to the [alternative rent policy] policy changed over the past year?

II. GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF NEW RENT POLICIES

5. What do you think about the [alternative rent policy]?
 - a. Has your opinion evolved since the start of enrollment? How/why?
6. What do you think the goals of the [alternative rent policy] at your agency are?
 - a. Do you think the agency is achieving or is on track to achieve those goals? Why/why not/say more?
7. Between the standard policy and the new policy, is there one that is better for residents? Why/why not?
8. Between the standard policy and the new policy, would you say that one is easier or harder to administer? If yes, in what way(s)?
9. If another housing agency asked you for advice about implementing an alternative rent policy like [the stepped/tiered rent policy], what advice would you give them?
 - a. Is there anything that you would change about the rent policy?

III. OPERATIONAL, PROGRAM, POLICY CONTEXTS AND CHANGES

10. Are there any significant changes to how your program / department operates generally in the past year that come to mind?
 - a. Do you think this has affected or will affect how your agency operates the [alternative rent policy]?
11. Have these or any other changes at your agency occurred as a direct result of implementing the [alternative rent policy]?
 - a. Required probes (If yes to any, ask the respondent to please describe):
 - i. The number of households served?
 - ii. The frequency of contact between households under and staff?
 - iii. The opening of waitlists or issuance of housing subsidy?
 - iv. Staffing or operations changes?
 - v. Changes to other programs, such as FSS? (If yes, does the agency require participation in or automatically refer households to an FSS program specifically designed for the [alternative rent policy]?)
12. Are there significant challenges associated with operating more than one rent policy at your PHA? [If yes] Please describe.
13. How does your agency conduct quality assurance on the implementation of [the alternative rent policy]?
 - a. Probe for frequency of case reviews / sampling approach.
14. Have quality assurance reviews revealed any issues with [Stepped/Tiered Rent] implementation?
 - a. [If yes] Please describe issues.
 - b. Has any staff retraining been considered or implemented?

15. Are there certain staff skills or competencies that you feel are necessary for successful implementation of the [alternative rent policy] versus standard policy?
16. Has your PHA experienced turnover in positions necessary to implement the [Stepped/Tiered] rent policy? If yes:
 - a. Which positions?
 - b. What factors may have influenced that turnover?
 - c. Are vacancies being filled?
17. Do you feel as though staffing levels for [alternative rent policy]-specific tasks are sufficient? Why/why not?
 - a. Have you made or are you considering making changes to staffing levels or the overall approach to staffing [alternative rent policy] functions now that the enrollment period has ended?

IV. AGENCY POLICY AND STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS

18. Other than the implementation of [alternative rent policy] have there been any noticeable effects of having MTW status and your agency's use of MTW flexibility at this juncture?
 - a. Have any new MTW activities been implemented or proposed that might interact or change the way the [alternative rent policy] is operated?
19. How has Stepped and Tiered Rent Demonstration implementation affected how the Family Self-Sufficiency program is offered at your PHA?
 - a. (If FSS offerings changed) What has changed? What led the PHA to adopt these specific changes? How do you feel the implementation of those changes is going? What are the effects?
20. Have there been any notable reactions to the [alternative rent policy] from stakeholders such as:
 - a. Landlords?
 - b. Community members?
 - c. Housing advocates?
 - d. Elected officials?
 - e. Board members?

V. IMPLEMENTING THE CORE ALTERNATIVE RENT POLICY FEATURES

21. Thinking about the final months of the enrollment period to today, have there been any significant process changes made to implement the [alternative rent policy] more efficiently or effectively? If so, what were they, what motivated them, and how well would you say that the procedures are working now?
22. What types of ongoing training or additional supports would be useful now to help you administer the [alternative rent policy]?
23. Are there any additional modifications to PHA software to support implementation of the [alternative rent policy] that you would recommend at this point? Please describe.

VI. HOUSEHOLD COMMUNICATION, REACTIONS, AND CIRCUMSTANCES

24. What approaches has your agency used to communicate and remind households about the [alternative rent policy] over the past year?
 - a. Probes:

- i. How well have these communication strategies worked, do you think? What was the reaction (if any)?
25. Do you think there are any ways to increase household awareness about the [alternative rent policy] that could be tried? Are there ways in which you feel communication to households about the [alternative rent policy] could be improved?
 26. From your perspectives, do you think the [alternative rent policy] has resulted in more households reaching any of the following milestones than those in the standard rent policy?
 - a. Zero HAP or Flat Rent due to increased income
 - b. End of Program / Termination for negative reasons

VII. HARDSHIP IMPLEMENTATION

27. Overall, how well do you feel that the hardship policies are working?
28. Have any changes been made to the hardship policies or procedures in the past year?
29. [Stepped rent PHAs only] Have any households had their rent reset under the stepped-rent policy?
 - a. Probes: were the household or staff-initiated, number/frequency of stepped-rent resets, process, household conditions/contexts that triggered the requests, if applicable
 - b. What share of stepped-rent households do you expect to ultimately request or receive stepped-rent resets?
30. Is the PHA's software system adequately set up to help your PHA track and manage hardship requests?
 - a. Possible probes: Are any requests not being tracked inside the system? Is the system adequately flagging households that are eligible for automatic hardships?
31. Do you feel that households subject to the [alternative rent policy] are sufficiently aware that they may request hardships and the process for doing so?
32. Are there types of households experiencing hardship who are not covered by the hardship policies available to households in the [alternative rent policy]?
33. Your housing agency has the ability to provide hardships for "extenuating circumstances." Are there examples of hardships that meet this criterion that your agency has granted?
34. HUD gave your agency flexibility to determine the duration of hardship periods granted to eligible households. Are you satisfied with your agency's hardship duration? Why/why not?
35. Are there any changes to the hardship policies that you might recommend at this time?

VII. OVERALL REFLECTIONS AND WRAP UP

36. What have been the greatest successes of [alternative rent policy] implementation so far?
37. What have been the greatest challenges of [alternative rent policy] implementation so far?
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. Would you recommend that another housing agency adopt the [alternative rent policy] as it's currently operated at your agency? Why/why not?
41. Is there anything else that you would like to share that we haven't covered?

42. Do you have any questions for me?