



# Landlord Interview: Qualitative Impact (QuIP) Interview Protocol

MTW4 Evaluation: Landlord Incentives

Last Modified: October 5, 2022

## Introduction to Protocol for Reviewers

The QuIP approach aims to keep interviewees unaware of the intervention that is being evaluated. The interview protocol therefore does not mention the Section 8 program until the very end of the interview where the interviewer has a chance to explore with the interviewee some more specific information related to the Section 8 program.

The style of the QuIP approach is to ask about changes in different topic areas where the intervention might be expected to have an impact. In this protocol we ask about the following topic areas where we might expect to see changes as a result of the landlord incentives:

- Business environment
- Work related to renting to tenants
- Perception of and experiences with tenants

We have designed questions that ask about any changes, and then ask the interviewee to explain what caused those changes from their perspective. We then ask them to summarize the particular direction of the change: positive, negative or stayed the same.

We have also included at the end of the interview some questions from the TIA landlord protocol related specifically to the Section 8 program so that we are able to validate the QuIP data with additional information about landlord experiences of the Section 8 program.

The following interview protocol will be piloted and adjusted accordingly to eliminate any questions which do not yield useful information. Interviewers will be trained to keep a core focus on the goals of the interview and manage the interview time accordingly.

## Paperwork Reduction Act – Burden Statement

Public Reporting Burden for this information collection is estimated to average 60 minutes per respondent, including time to review the information in the Study Overview. The MTW Evaluation: Landlord Incentives is a study of the implementation and impacts of providing selected incentives to landlords to participate in the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. This information is being collected to document landlord perceptions of PHA activities that could affect landlord participation in the HCV program. Respondents are not required to respond. The information requested is protected and held confidential in accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552a (Privacy Act of 1974) and OMB Circular No. A-130.

## Study Overview and Verbal Informed Consent (10 min)

(Read to all respondents)

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [insert name], and I am a researcher from Abt Associates. We are working with a funder who is interested in understanding landlords' experiences. As part of that study, we are talking with landlords all over the country to learn what it is like to own or manage rental properties. We think it is important to talk to landlords and property managers because your experience providing rental housing will help us understand more about the challenges, concerns, and context of renting. We want to learn all about your work and how you make decisions about your business and investments.

We will keep everything you tell us completely private. We will not share these conversations with anyone outside of our research team. We will not link your name with any quotes we may use in our reports. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to and you can quit at any time.

We ask people to choose a fake name that we can use for your stories. We'll use this name on the tape. That way your real name will not be attached to any of this information. What name would you like to choose?

To make sure we report what you say correctly and accurately we would like to record this interview. We can stop or pause the recording at any point at any time you like. No one will hear the recording except for the research team. Would it be okay with you if we record our conversation?

Great. Before I turn the recorder on, do you have any questions?

**Do you agree to participate in the conversation today?** *[If participant selects no, terminate the interview.]*

Yes  No

**Is it okay for me to record the conversation?** *[If participant selects no, do not record the conversation; only take verbatim notes.]*

Yes  No

*Make the following statement after you have turned on the tape recorder:* The recording is now on. This is [fieldworker name], and I'm chatting with [their pseudonym] [their ID number], on [the date] in [general place interview is held].

## Background context to understand about the landlord

*Thanks so much for talking with us! We want to start by getting to know about your history working as a landlord. I have a few questions to ask about this!*

**A.1.** How long have you been in the rental property business? (they can answer how many years or since what year)

*Probe:*

- How did you get into it?
- Are all your properties in [city]? If not, how long have you been in the business in [city]?

**A.2.** Tell me about the properties you own or manage in [insert PHA city].

*Probes:*

- How many properties/units do you own/manage in [insert PHA city]?
- For your properties in [insert name of city] which neighborhoods are the properties located in?
- Tell me all about the buildings (structure, size, quality, condition, number of units).
- Tell me all about the locations (neighborhood, neighborhood reputation, proximity to amenities, demographics of the neighborhood)

**A.3.** Tell me about whether any of your properties have income or other restrictions in which tenants you can rent to.

*Probes:*

- Is there an entity which requires those restrictions?
- Can those restrictions be changed at all? If so, how?

**A.4.** Do the restrictions on some of the units influence who you rent other units in the property to?

**A.5.** Tell me about your tenants. How do you usually find tenants?

*Probe:*

- What is your marketing strategy to find tenants?
- What screening process do you use to determine tenants?

**ANCHOR POINT:** Before we go further in the interview, I want to pause for a moment and ask you to think back to the summer four years ago in time, so [year]. In the following sections, I'm going to ask some questions that reference changes in the last four years, and sometimes it helps people to think about a specific event that happened at that point in time so that they can remember the specific events that were happening at that time, i.e. the summer four years ago. Can you tell me a specific event related to your property or rental business, that happened during the summer four years ago? This might be a key staff person joining or leaving the team, or adding a new property into your portfolio, or another milestone related to your rental business.

[Discuss with person what that anchor point is.]

Ok, thank you for sharing this information. We're now going to dive into some of the details of your rental business, and I will ask questions that reference back to that three-year point.

## Financial and Business Domain

Questions B1 through B4 are questions for landlords who have owned rental property for four years or longer.

Questions B5 through B7 are for landlords who became landlords within the last four years.

First of all, let's talk in more detail about the financial picture of your rental businesses over the last four years.

**B.1.** First of all, taking your overall portfolio, can you tell me about your rental business's overall financial picture in the last four years, so since the summer of [year] when [anchor point]. Has income from rental:

Increased / Decreased/ Stayed the same

**B.2.** Now I'd like us to talk about each of your properties' situation in a bit more depth. Tell me about the costs and income for up to four properties that you feel most familiar with. in [insert name of city].

For each property over the past four years:

Property no.	*Type of tenant	*Have costs: increased / decreased/ stayed the same	If costs changed, why have they changed?	*Has income: increased / decreased/ stayed the same	If income changed, why?	*Overall, is financial situation: improved/ worse/ the same	Any other reasons which have influenced this overall?
1							
2							

3							
4							

**\*B.3.** Going back to your portfolio as a whole, has the business environment for operating your properties: stayed the same, improved, or got worse over the last three years?

*[Unless answered 'stayed the same' go to B4, if 'stayed the same' skip to section C]*

**B.4.** Can you tell me why you answered that way, what has changed in the business environment to impact your costs and income?

*(If they ask what you mean, then give an example of a city or state requirement, such as fire code, or similar, that has been changed to require less time, or cost to implement)*

Ask for specific examples and then use the probe: "Can you tell me more about that example?"

IF LANDLORD BECAME A LANDLORD WITHIN THE LAST FOUR YEARS.

**B.5.** Tell me about the process of becoming a landlord in the last four years.

**B.6.** What were the financial considerations which influenced your decision to become a landlord? Please give me specific examples.

**B.7.** Since you became a landlord, has anything in the business environment impacted your costs and income?

### Work involved in renting Domain

*I'm interested to hear more about the steps involved in taking care of the property and renting it out to tenants.*

**C.1.** Tell me about your job. What are the tasks that you are responsible for? I'm interested to hear about all the jobs that you do.

**C.2.** *(If not mentioned before)* What is your role in renting out units in the property. Tell me about your day to day work in renting out units.

**C.3.** What pieces of the work of renting out units do other people in your business manage?

*Probe:* Describe for me any third parties, such as real estate agents, or other similar entities, that you pay to help with work finding tenants and renting out units. What are the jobs they do to find tenants and rent out units? How much control do you have over that process?

**C.4.** Tell me about the work involved with renting out the units in the property. I'd like you to talk me through the most recent unit rental and what was involved in renting it out.

*Probe:*

- Did you have a target market? Who were you trying to rent this unit to?
- How did you advertise the unit?
- What did you have to do to get the unit ready to rent?
- How do you manage applications and screen tenants? By phone? Email?
- Tell me about the criteria you are using to screen potential tenants? (e.g. credit scores, references)
- What other work is involved in renting the unit?

I want to think about the preparations and repairs you had to do to a unit when you rented it out four years ago, and one you rented out recently.

Let's start with the most recent unit. Tell me about a recent unit you rented out. What repairs and changes or other maintenance work did you do to that unit? Is that typical for such a unit?

Now tell me about the unit you're thinking about that you rented out four years ago. Can you share any details of the repairs and changes or other maintenance work you did to that unit?

What changes, if any, have you noticed about the kinds of repairs and maintenance that you do to units that you rent out?"

**C.5.** Have your company's policies and procedures about renting out units in your property/ies changed in the last four years? Or stayed the same?

*Probe:*

- For any changes described, please tell me more about each of those changes.
- For any changes described, please tell me what has happened to cause those changes.
- For any changes described, please give me an example of how this might have influenced how you go about leasing up a unit.

**C.6.** Has the amount of work involved with renting units in your property/ies changed in the last four years? Or stayed the same?

*Probe:*

- For any changes described, please tell me what has happened to cause those changes.
- For any changes described, have those changes impacted the financial costs of your property?



- For any changes described, how have you managed the staffing of those changes? E.g. if they describe less work, have they let any staff go? Or for increased changes, has this increased their need for staffing? Or meant existing staff have more tasks to manage?

## Changes in Marketing units

*Now I'd like to talk about how you market your units available to rent.*

**D.1.** Can you tell me how you typically market your available rental units? Is this the same for every unit? Or does it differ according to which unit you are renting?

Probe:

- If it differs, can you tell me the different kinds of units you have, and how you market each one?

**D.2.** What type of tenant are you trying to get to apply to your units?

**D.3.** Has how you market your units changed in the last four years?

## Changes in Perception of tenants (sub-text is Section 8 voucher holders)

*Now I'd like to talk to you a bit about who you want to rent to in general, and how you decide whether or not a tenant will be a good fit for you to rent to.*

**E.1.** Please tell me about the process of renting and marketing to tenants?

If you do not handle this, which staff member does? What does X staff member do for marketing/renting to tenants?

**E.2.** What are you looking for in a tenant? Does this differ from building to building? Or unit to unit?

**E.3.** What do you look for that tells you you've found the right tenant?

*Probes:*

- Communication styles of tenant
- Concrete qualifications like credit, income, etc
- Other characteristics?

**E.4.** Tell me about your ideal tenant.

**E.5.** Have you had any experiences with tenants over the last four years (or since you started being a landlord for newer landlords) that have changed who you target who you rent to? If so, can you tell me about that/those experiences you've had that influenced this change?

**E.6.** Are there types of tenants who you used to avoid and who you are now more open to renting to?

**E.7.** Has anything about what you look for in your ideal tenant changed over the last four years, since the summer of [year]?

**E.8.** Have you changed anything about what type of tenant you are looking for over the last four years?

**E.9.** Have you had any conversations with other landlords or colleagues over the last four years that have changed who you target your units to rent to? If so, can you tell me about those conversations?

Probe:

- What aspects of who you target your units to did you talk about?
- What specific characteristics of who you rent to did you change as a result of those conversations?

## Programs/initiatives being offered to landlords in the city

Now I want to talk about the kinds of programs and initiatives that are being offered to landlords in the city or state. We're interested in hearing about your experiences with these.

**F.1.** Can you tell me about any programs or initiatives that are being offered to landlords in the city or state that you know about?

*Probes for each program/initiative mentioned:*

- What is the name of this program?
- Who offers the program?
- What does the program do for landlords?

**F.2.** Have you used any of the program or initiatives that are being offered to landlords in the city or state? If yes, what have your experiences been?

**F.3.** Did these programs or initiatives change anything about how you run your property? Or who you rent to? If so, how?

## Changes in overall environment for renting

**G.1.** Can you describe for me the overall environment in [name of city] for renting apartments.

**G.2.** How has this environment changed over the last four years since the summer of [year]?

**G.3.** Is it easier? Or harder to rent an apartment to the renters that you target?

**G.4.** What factors influence whether it is easier or harder to rent your apartments?

**(IF THE LANDLORD HASN'T MENTIONED SECTION 8 OR HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHERS AT ALL, GO THROUGH THIS SECTION BEFORE THE FINAL QUESTIONS)**

## Subsidized Housing Programs

**1. Tell me about your experience with the Housing Choice Voucher or Section 8 programs?** *[Note: You may know whether they accept vouchers (from listing) but ask this question broadly regardless. This question will help you determine their level of involvement in the HCV program and place them into one of three categories 1) landlords who actively recruit HCV tenants for some of their units; 2) landlords who are indifferent to the program; 3) landlords who reject the program.]*

*Have you ever rented to a voucher holding tenant? (If yes, answer questions 2-14. If no, skip to question 15.)*

**2. Tell me about how the Section 8 program works?** [*Play dumb. Ask this question regardless of whether or not they participate in the voucher program.*]

How does the program set rent limits? For particular areas? For particular units?  
Which PHA do you accept vouchers from?

**4. Tell me about the logistics of renting to a tenant with a voucher? Tell me about the specific rules and regulations that make these tenants different from market rate tenants.** [*Play dumb. Ask this question regardless of whether or not they participate in the voucher program.*]

How does the program set rent limits? For particular areas? For particular units?  
Walk me through the process and how it is different from market tenants.  
How and when are you paid? What if a tenant doesn't pay their portion?

Which PHA do you accept vouchers from?

[*If the landlord accepts vouchers from more than one PHA*] Are there things one PHA does that is different from another PHA?

**5. Tell me about the PHA staff who you've interacted with.**

Who are your contact people when you have a question and a problem?  
Are there particular folks there who are a pleasure to work with? Tell me that story.  
Tell me about a customer service experience that made you frustrated.

**6. Tell me the story of your last voucher inspection, including the good, the bad, and the ugly.**

What did you do to prepare for the inspection?  
What sorts of things have you needed to repair because of an inspection?  
Are the inspectors fair? Do you know them?  
What about requirements related to housing quality? Does anyone inspect the unit?

**7. Tell me about Section 8 tenants. How are they different from market rate tenants?**

*Probe:* How does it impact repairs and maintenance?  
*Probe:* How does it impact length of tenure?

**8. Did you advertise specifically to voucher holders for any of these units? Tell me more about that. Why does having a voucher holder in those units make sense?**

*Probe:* Sources to market to voucher holders.

*Key Probe:* Does Section 8/market vary between your different properties? *Probe:* location, neighborhood, stock, condition

**9. What do you do differently when marketing to voucher holders? What types of characteristics make a unit attractive to voucher holders?**

*Probe:* What about the physical unit? Do you do certain types of renovations if you're targeting voucher holders?

**10. Tell me about the kinds of things you can do to a property to get higher rents from the voucher program?**

*Probe:* What sorts of units have rents closer or above the payment standard.

**11. Tell me about the advantages and disadvantages of renting to voucher holders.**

*No matter what they do, try to get them to articulate the advantages and disadvantages.*

*Probe:* Assurance that you will get the rent on time, government intervention, tenants, bureaucracy, inspections

**12. [If not covered already] Are there some units you prefer to rent to Section 8 households? How do you decide?**

*Probe:* Neighborhood, unit quality, rents.

**13. [If they own multi-unit properties] Sometimes landlords tell us that having one unit rented to voucher holders makes it harder to rent the other units in the building to market tenants. Tell me about your experience.**

**14. How does your screening process vary based on whether or not the household has a voucher? Are there different techniques that make sense for different groups?**

[IF THEY SAY THEY HAVE NEVER RENTED TO A VOUCHER HOUSEHOLD]

**15. You said you've never rented to a voucher family...**

*There will be major differences between those who don't participate because it's never been an issue (their rents are too high for example) and those that don't participate because they don't want to.*

**15a. Have you ever been approached by a household with a voucher? Tell me about the last time and your decision not to participate in the program.**

*Probe:* How did they contact you?

*Probe:* At what stage did you realize they had a voucher?

*Probe:* What other qualities/deficits did they have?

*Probe:* Describe your decision-making process.

**15b. Do you have any associates, friends or colleagues who rent or have rented to households with vouchers? Tell me what stories they have told you.**

**15c. [If non-participation is enthusiastic]: What would need to change about the program to get you to participate?**

*Whatever they state in answer to this question, you should work to get the details of their concern.*

*If the issue is practical (the paperwork takes too long), make sure you understand what they're basing that assessment on. What experience do they have with the issue?*

## Final questions

If you could change one thing to make it easier to rent out your apartments, what would it be?

Do you have any other context or information that you think it is useful for our team to know about in understanding how you make decisions about renting out your apartments?

*Thanks so much for your time. We really appreciate your input.*

[INTERVIEWER PROVIDES INCENTIVE TO LANDLORD]