

PHA Program Director/Manager Group Implementation Interview Guide (Round 3)**PHA Managers/Supervisors****Semi-Structured Group Interview Guide****Round 3 Staff Interviews**

[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. Only data collection instruments that are approved by Office of Management and Budget (OMB) may be fielded in this study. This data collection instrument is approved by the OMB, and assigned 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:

- Nina Castells, Study Co-Principal Investigator and Project Director, nina.castells@mdrc.org
- Nandita Verma, Study Co-Principal Investigator, nandita.verma@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

We'd like to start with some background information.

1. Please confirm your job title?
2. How long have you been in your current role? How long have you been working at PHA?
3. What are your responsibilities related to the [alternative rent policy]?

II. GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF NEW RENT POLICIES

4. What are your current thoughts about the [stepped/tiered rent] policy?
 - a. What do you like most about this policy?
5. What is the most challenging part of administering the alternative rent policy?
 - a. Is this something that continues to be a challenge since the initial certifications under this demonstration, or is it a new challenge?
 - b. Are there any other parts of the alternative rent policy that are challenging to administer? In what ways?
6. Compared to the standard rent rules policy, do you think the [stepped/tiered rent] policy is better or worse for residents? Why/in what ways?
7. Compared to the standard rent rules, would you say that the new policy is easier or harder to administer? Explain why it is easier/more challenging, in what way(s)?

III. OPERATIONAL, PROGRAM, POLICY CONTEXTS AND CHANGES

8. Have there been any significant changes to how your program or your department operates in terms of staffing, data system, income verification, or other policies over the last two years? Describe.
9. Have any of these changes affected how your agency implements the [stepped/tiered rent] policy? Probe: verification of retrospective income, hardship durations, etc.
10. Describe your current staffing for the [tiered/stepped rent] policy?
 - a. Do staff work with standard rent households as well as [stepped/tiered] households?
 - b. Are there currently any open positions? How is that affecting the implementation of the [stepped/tiered rent] policy?
 - a. How many staff are currently processing [stepped/tiered] cases?
 - b. How many of these staff have been in their position for less than 1 year?
11. Is staff turnover affecting the implementation of [stepped/tiered rent] policy? Explain.

IV. COMMUNICATION WITH HOUSEHOLDS

12. Prior to the triennials eligibility checks /recertifications -- how has your agency communicated or reminded households about the [stepped/tiered rent] policy?
 - a. Are these mainly targeted communications (e.g., to those with hardships) or sent to all households in the [stepped/tiered] group?

- b. Have the communication [strategies] about [stepped/tiered rent] policies changed over time? If so, why and how have household reactions changed?
- 13. Where do you think households get information about [stepped/tiered rent] policy? Probe: web site, they call staff, flyers.
- 14. Which aspects of the [stepped/tiered rent] policy do you think participants MOST need to be reminded about?
 - a. At what point in time would it be most helpful to hear these reminders?
 - b. Are these the same as the aspects that are most confusing to participants?
- 15. Are there questions or topics about the policy that households raise or that keep coming up?
- 16. [Stepped Rent agencies only:] How are households reacting to the annual step increases? Have their reactions changed over the past three years (three increases)?
- 17. Describe the communication to households about the triennial eligibility checks/recertifications process?
 - a. When did this communication occur?
 - b. What form did it take? (e.g., letter)
 - c. What were they told? (if we don't have on file, ask for a copy of material sent to stepped/tiered households)

V. TRIENNIAL ELIGIBILITY CHECKS /RECERTIFICATIONS

- 18. What kind of preparation, planning, and/or retraining was offered to staff before they began conducting the triennial eligibility checks/recertifications?
 - a. When did planning start?
 - b. What did the preparation/training entail? Did it focus on particular topics? How long was this process?
[Probe: what training/planning was done in addition to the materials/support provided by MDRC?
 - c. Do you think staff need additional supports or training at this point?
- 19. What is most challenging about the triennial eligibility checks/recertifications?
- 20. Has anything surprised you about the triennial eligibility checks /recertifications?
- 21. [Stepped Rent agencies only:] How are households responding to the triennial eligibility checks?
 - a. What kinds of reactions do staff get?
 - b. Do households understand why they are providing current income documentation?
- 22. [Tiered Rent agencies only:] How are households responding to the triennial recertification?
 - a. What kind of reactions do staff get?
 - b. Do households understand why their rent is going up or down?
- 23. Based on the recertifications/reviews completed so far, are you finding households have increased their earned income?
 - a. What types of households? Probe: are those who were already working - working more hours? Are people going to work who weren't working?
 - b. How does this compare to your expectations about how households would fare under the new rent rules?
 - c. Do you hear from households that they have increased earnings BECAUSE of the [stepped/tiered] policy?
 - d. [Tiered rent PHAs only:] How do households with significant income increases react to new rent amounts? Probe: were they surprised/prepared for the increase?

24. Based on the recertifications/reviews completed so far, are you seeing more households in [stepped/tiered rent] policy reaching Zero HAP/Flat Rent than those in the standard rent policy?
25. Are there any changes you would propose to how retrospective income is verified or how rent is calculated under the [stepped/tiered rent] policy? Why/why not?

VI. RETROSPECTIVE INCOME [TIERED RENT PHAS ONLY]

26. What are your current thoughts about the use of retrospective income under the tiered rent policy?
 - a. Has your perspective changed over time?
27. Did your agency make a change to the HUD verification hierarchy to allow for more frequent use of self-certifications of income than before?
28. If so, did this change the frequency of using self-certifications in calculating retrospective income?
29. Is accuracy of self-certifications an issue? In what way is it an issue?
30. Does your agency do any subsequent checks (e.g., with EIV) to learn about any discrepancies in reported income? If so, what types of issues do you see?

VII. HARDSHIP IMPLEMENTATION

31. Overall, how well do you feel that the hardship policies are working to protect households?
32. [Stepped Rent agencies only:] What are your thoughts about the 40% threshold needed to qualify for a hardship?
33. [Stepped Rent agencies only:] Have any households requested hardships because their income did not increase to cover the step rent increase (i.e., they did not have an income loss but could not cover rent increase)? How many?
34. [Tiered Rent agencies only:] Are you finding that some households who request hardships have income decreases but not enough to drop them to a lower tier? If so, is this a few/some/most of the hardship requests you have processed?
35. What share of households have received multiple and/or continuous hardships? Do these households differ from those that have received only one hardship so far?

Probe: different work history, length of time in housing, family size and composition
36. [Stepped Rent agencies only:] Does your agency have criteria for determining when to conduct a stepped rent reset?

Probe: additional criteria beyond the criteria for being on a hardship for one year?

 - a. Do staff initiate this process or does the household request it? Probe: Do households even know about step resets?
37. Do you think the hardship policy may keep some households from working more/going back to work? Explain why/why not.
38. Are there changes to the hardship policies that you would recommend?
 - a. Would you keep or change the hardship duration? Why?

VIII. OVERALL REFLECTIONS AND WRAP UP

39. Which aspects of the [stepped/tiered rent] rules are working well?

40. 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?
41. Should [PHA] continue implementing [stepped/tiered rent] policy after the study ends?
Why/why not?
42. Is there anything you would recommend changing about any aspect of the [stepped/tiered rent policy] that you have not already shared?