

Rental Housing Finance Survey (RHFS) Protocol

4/28/23

ESMD

Introduction

- Thank you for your time today. My name is XX and I work for the United States Census Bureau. My research team evaluates how easy or difficult Census surveys are to complete. What works well, we keep. When potential users, such as you, have difficulty with something, we have an opportunity to fix it.
- Before we start, did you get a chance to look over and sign the consent form I sent over? It explains the purpose of today's session and your rights as a participant. Only those of us connected with the project will have access to these notes and they will be used solely for research purposes. Your name will not be associated with any of the data collected during the session. Any information you provide will be kept confidential.

[Confirm they received and signed the Consent Form]

Thank you.

- I am going to give you a little background about what we will be working on today. We are testing several new questions that are under consideration to be added to the Rental Housing Finance Survey, which you were a respondent for in the past. This is a pretesting evaluation.
- For today's session, I'm going to have you read over several of the new questions and ask you some questions to get your feedback. We're exploring whether or not the questions make sense as they are written, and also how easy or difficult they may be for you to answer. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Ok great.

About the Respondent

First, I'd like to learn a bit about you, and your role here regarding this rental property.

- What is your job title?

Now I'd like to learn a little about your company.

- Can you give us a brief description of what you, or your company, does and how it is organized?
 - o Is it an independent business, or part of larger establishment?
- IF property management company:
 - o Are you one of the owners of the rental property or of the business that owns the rental property?
- In the past, what was your role in the process for responding to the Rental Housing Finance Survey? (*Gather data? Enter data? Consult with data providers? Etc.*)

- o Do you work with anyone else in your company to get the data for the RHFS?
 - How are those other people involved?
 - What are their roles/titles?

Thanks for providing some background information. Now let's look at the survey questions.

WELCOME

Welcome to the 2023 Rental Housing Finance Survey (RHFS)

The purpose of the RHFS is to learn about the financial health of rental properties. We have randomly selected the address listed above to be included in the 2023 RHFS. Due to the scientifically random selection process, we only know that the address listed above is a rental property or is part of a rental property.

Item 1

Is the property at 123 Main St Any Town CA 12345 a rental property?

Include properties that are rented or vacant but available for rent.

- 1 Yes
- 2 No – go to Thank you

Item 1a1 *New Item

Is this rental property owned by the military or owned and operated by a separate entity on behalf of the military?

Do not include group quarters such as barracks

- 1 Yes – go to DP_1
- 2 No

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
- Is there anything confusing about this question?
- Even if this question is not applicable to you, hypothetically, would you include group quarters (barracks) in your answer? (a building or group of buildings used to house soldiers.)

Item 1b

Is this rental property part of a manufactured housing community (manufactured/mobile homes)?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No – go to 1c

Item 1b1

Does the monthly rent include the lot only, the manufactured home only, or both the lot and manufactured home?

Lot rent may include water, sewer, or other expenses.

- 1 Lot only – go to DP_1
- 2 Manufactured home only – go to DP_1
- 3 Both lot and manufactured home – go to DP_1

Item 1c

Is 123 Main St Any Town CA 12345 part of an apartment complex?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No – go to item DP_1

Item 1f

Please provide the apartment complex name and the main complex address, telephone number, and website.

- Apartment Complex Name:
 - Street Address:
 - City:
 - State:
 - Zip:
 - Phone:
 - Website:
- What are your thoughts about the “Apartment Complex Name” field?
 - o What does the complex name refer to in your opinion?
 - o Does the term “apartment complex” have the same or different meaning to you than “Complex name”?

Item DP_1

The following series of questions is designed to help define the rental property that INCLUDES {123 Main St Any Town CA 12345}.

For the purposes of this survey, please define the rental property as:

- The building at 123 Main St Any Town CA 12345 and any other buildings under the same first mortgage
Or
- The building at 123 Main St Any Town CA 12345 and any other buildings that are collectively owned as a single entity.

Thinking about these definitions, which of the following best describes your rental property?

1. The rental property is composed of a single residential building located at 123 Main St Any Town CA 12345
2. The rental property is composed of multiple residential buildings that are all located at 123 Main St Any Town CA 12345
3. The rental property is composed of multiple residential buildings at multiple addresses that includes the building(s) at 123 Main St Any Town CA 12345.
4. Other

- How would you answer this question?
 - Is there anything confusing?
- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?
 - IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?
- Do you have any feedback about the phrase “collectively owned as a single entity”, is it clear or unclear what is being conveyed? Describe in your own words.
- Take a moment to read through the answer categories 1-4.
 - What do you think about the answer categories? Are they clear or unclear?
 - Is there anything missing?
- Can you think of a scenario in which you would select “Other”?

Item DP_4

Thinking about the ENTIRE rental property, how many residential buildings are at the rental property associated with 123 Main St Any Town CA 12345?

Total Residential Buildings _____

- How would you answer this question?
 - How confident are you that this answer is/would be accurate?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?
- When answering this question, what were you including in your answer? The number of buildings for the entire property or for a sampled address?
 - IF ANSWER DIFFERENT THAN RECORDS: It looks like when you last reported for this

survey, you responded X number of buildings, were you including the entire property at that time? Or just the units for the sampled address?

- Or was there some other reason things changed since 2021?

Item DP_7

Thinking about the ENTIRE rental property, how many residential units are at the rental property associated with 123 Main St Any Town CA 12345?

Include units that are rented, available for rent, and occupied by the owner or property personnel. Exclude model units, stores, and office space.

A residential unit may be a house, an apartment, a condominium unit, a manufactured home, etc., that is considered to be separate living quarters. Separate living quarters are those in which the occupants live separately from any other individuals in the building and have direct access from outside the building or through a common hall.

Total Residential Units _____

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
- How would you answer this question?
 - How confident are you that this answer is/would be accurate?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?
 - Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?
 - IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?
- When answering this question, what were you including in your answer? The number of units for the entire property or for a sampled address?
 - IF ANSWER DIFFERENT THAN RECORDS: It looks like when you last reported for this survey, you responded X number of units, were you including the entire property at that time? Or just the units for the sampled address?
 - Or was there some other reason for the change since 2021?

Item 4c

What do you estimate is the current market value of this rental property?

Current Market Value

\$ __ __ __, __ __ __, __ __ __, __ __ __.00

Item 4d

Which of the following best reflects how you determined your estimate of the current market value?

- 1 Local tax assessment of this property
- 2 Recent real estate appraisal - go to 6RENT_1
- 3 Insurance replacement cost
- 4 Original purchase price plus inflation
- 5 Original purchase price plus improvements and inflation
- 6 Selling or asking price of similar properties in area
- 7 Capitalization of current rental revenues
- 8 Other

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?
 - Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?
 - IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?
- Any thoughts on the options provided? Is there anything missing?

Item 4e *new

Did you receive an appraisal waiver when you purchased this property?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
- Are you familiar with appraisal waivers? Describe.
- Do you think including a definition of appraisal waivers would be helpful, or unhelpful?

6RENT_1 *new

How do you receive the rental payments? Select all that apply

- Online payments (such as automatic drafts from credit/debit cards, bill pay, direct deposit, etc.)
- Credit cards (other than online payments)
- *Check/cashier's check/money orders
- *Cash
- *Other (specify)

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
- How would you answer this question?
- Do you have any feedback on the answer categories?
 - Are there any answer categories we are missing?
 - Is there anything confusing?

Item 6a

Thinking about the typical lease length for this home, would you describe it as:

- 1 Long term (6 months or longer) – go to 6e
- 2 Short term (2 – 6 months)
- 3 Weekly

**Note, this item is only for cases that report 1 unit in DP_7.*

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
- How would you answer this question?
- Do you have any feedback on the answer categories?
 - Are there any answer categories we are missing?
 - (less than a week?)
 - Is there anything confusing?

Item 6a1 *new

Inconsistent with LEASING long term definition (6 months or longer.

In the last 12 months, was this rental unit previously available as a long term (6 months or longer) rental?

- 1 Yes Go to Item 6e
- 2 No

**Note, this item is only for cases that report 1 unit in DP_7*

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?

- Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?
 - IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?
- If this question asked “In the last **3 years**... was this rental unit previously available as a long-term (6-12 month) rental” how easy or difficult would that be to answer?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer for 3 years ago?

Item 6b

When you have vacancies, are any of your units made available as **either** daily or weekly rentals?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No – go to 6e

**Note, this item is only for case that report 2 or more units in DP_7*

Item 6c

How many of your units are made available as **either** daily or weekly rentals?

- Units _____

- [If relevant] Would you include Airbnb or other vacation rental properties in this count? Or not?
- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Is there consistency with this sort of availability for daily or weekly rentals (as in, only certain units have this type of flexibility), or does the availability change per unit?

Item 6d *new

In the last 12 months, how many of these {read number of units from 6c} units were previously available as long-term rentals?

- Units _____

- How would you answer this question?
- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
- [If relevant] Could the same unit be available as daily/weekly or longer term?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?
 - Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?
 - IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?
- If this question were to ask you to recall further back to 3 years, how easy or difficult would this question be to answer? (In the last 3 years, how many of these {read number of units from 6c} units were previously available as long-term rentals?)

- Would this question be any easier to answer, or more difficult, if it were worded in terms of a percentage of units that were previously available as long-term rentals 12 months ago?
- Would this question be any easier to answer, or more difficult, if it were worded in terms of a percentage of units that were previously available as long-term rentals 3 years ago?

Item 6e *New Item

What is the current amount of the rental application fee?

Application Fee \$ __, __ __ __.00

Fee waived > Go to Item 6e1

Comments:

- How would you answer this question?
 - Are application fees consistent across all units?
- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?
 - Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?
 - IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?
- Are rental application fees the same for all applicants? (Are they the same for all units?)
- Can you tell me about what is included in the rental application fee (for example credit check fees etc.)?

Item 6e1 *New Item

What is the amount of the rental application fee when the fee is not waived?

Application Fee \$ __, __ __ __.00

- How would you answer this question?
 - Are application fees consistent across all units?
- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?
 - Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?
 - IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?

Item 6f *New Item

When tenants sign a lease, which of the **following** best reflects the equivalent amount of the required security deposit? Check all that apply.

1. Less than 1 month's rent
2. 1 month's rent
3. Greater than 1 month's rent
4. No security deposit

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Do you think of security deposits in this way (as a comparison to a month's rent)
 - Would it be easier or harder to provide the dollar amount of the required security deposit?
- Do you have any feedback about these answer categories?

Item 11a

Are the following utilities included or excluded in the rent for most/majority of the buildings?

Report for the MAJORITY of buildings if the rental property contains several buildings with a mix of responses.

Report "Not included in rent" if the utility is billed to the renter but not included in the rent previously reported.

Included	Not Included	Not Available
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- Electricity
- Gas/Fuel oil
- Water
- Sewer
- Trash

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?
 - Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?
 - IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?
- Does the instruction regarding most/majority of the buildings complicate the question? Or does this make sense?
 - Is there anything confusing?

Item 18

How would you best describe the current ownership entity?

1. Individual investor, including joint ownership by two or more individuals, such as a married couple
2. Trustee for estate

3. LLP, LP, or LLC
4. Tenant in common
5. General partnership
6. Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT)
7. Real estate corporation
8. Housing cooperative organization or stock cooperative
9. Nonprofit organization (including religious institution, labor union, or fraternal organization)
10. Other kind of institution

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?
 - Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?
 - IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?
- Take a moment to read over the answer categories.
 - Do you have any feedback?
 - Is there anything confusing?
 - Is anything missing?

Item 18a *New

Does the {read the response type from item 18} own other residential rental properties other than the property at (fill sample address)?

1 Yes

2 No – go to 22

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?
 - Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?
 - IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?
- Would an example of the sorts of properties to consider be helpful here? Or not necessary?

Item 18b *New Item

How many other residential rental properties does the {read the response type from item 18} own?

Residential Rental Properties _____

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?
 - Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?

- IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?

Item 18c *New

How many residential units are included in these other properties?

Units _____

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?
 - Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?
 - IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?
- If this question was instead asked for a range (0-1 unit; 2-5; 5-15 etc) would that be any more or less easy to answer? Or about the same?
- Is the distinction between units and buildings clear to you? Or would a definition accessible on the page be useful, or not?

Item 22

Does this rental property **receive support from** any of the following FEDERAL Programs?

Yes No Don't Know

- A federal government sponsored, below-market interest rate loan GOVBELow
- A federal government rental subsidy OTHER than Section 8 payments to project or tenants RSUBSIDY
- Housing for the elderly direct loan program ELDERLY
- A government grant (HOME, CDBG, HOPE VI, SLFRF) GOVGRANT
- Other federal benefit BENEFOTH

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?
 - Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?
 - IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?
- Are you familiar with the government grants listed? (HOME, CDBG, HOPE VI, SLFRF)
 - Do you have an understanding of what each of these are? Or would you need to look them up?
 - **note that SLFRF is the only new item*
 - Would you know off the top of your head if any of these were applicable?
- Would a help link outlining these Federal programs be useful? Or not useful?

Item 24a

Is there a mortgage or similar debt on this rental property? Include mortgages that are backed by bond financing.

1 Yes

2 No – go to Thank_you

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?
 - Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?
 - IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?
- Can you describe what comes to mind when you read “similar debt”?
- Would a help link with examples of debts be helpful or not helpful?

Item 28a_1 *New Item

Is the debt on this rental property an energy-efficiency mortgage (EEM)?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

- How easy or difficult is this question to answer?
 - Would you need to look at any records to answer this?
 - Would you need to reach out to other people or departments to answer this question?
 - IF YES: What departments/positions would you reach out to?
- Are you familiar with energy-efficiency mortgages?
- Is it clear what “debt” is referring to?

WRAP UP

- In general, what are your impressions of the questions we went over?
 - Did any of the items we went over stand out as particularly difficult or burdensome?
- How long do you estimate it will take you to complete the RHFS?
- Do you have any other comments or suggestions about anything we have discussed today?

Thank you for your time and valuable feedback!!