INSTRUMENT 7: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR OPPORTUNITY AREA LANDLORDS
Evaluation of the Community Choice Demonstration

This interview guide is intended for landlords, property owners, or property managers who have units in opportunity areas and who have interacted with housing mobility services in the past.

Note for interviewer: The section transitions are important for clarifying nuanced differences between sections and reducing repetitiveness felt during pretests.

CONSENT

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I am <NAME>, a researcher at <ORGANIZATION>, and this is <NAME> from <ORGANIZATION>. Before we begin, I want to tell you a few things about this study and your participation in it. Please feel free to ask me any questions you might have as I move through the introduction.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) hired a research team to conduct a study on HUD's Community Choice Demonstration (Demonstration). The research team is led by Abt Associates and includes the Urban Institute and other organizations that are involved in other components of the demonstration. The Demonstration is underway in nine sites across the US and involves offering services to families and to property owners to help families who have a Housing Choice Voucher find and remain in rental housing in lower-poverty areas. The purpose of the study is to determine whether and to what extent mobility services are effective in helping Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) families move to higher-opportunity, lower-poverty neighborhoods.

As part of this study, we will be talking with other landlords, representatives from Public Housing Agencies (PHAs), mobility service providers, and households who are participating in the Demonstration. During this interview, we will ask you questions about your experiences as a landlord/property manager/owner, and your perspective on the standard Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) or Section 8 voucher program and on the Demonstration, including questions about how well the HCV or Section 8 and the Demonstration voucher programs meet the needs of participating families. We are not evaluating your work as a landlord. At the end of the interview, you will receive a $30 gift card. Your participation is voluntary, and you can choose not to answer any question and choose to end the conversation at any time.

We will be conducting at least two rounds of interviews and we may reach out to you again in a couple of years for an additional interview.

I am required to tell you that the questions in this interview have been reviewed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 60 minutes, including preparation and follow-up. The OMB number is OMB #: XXX-XXXX, expiring on XX/XX/XXXX.

During the interview, one of the researchers will be taking detailed notes, but we will not identify your name in our notes. With your permission, we will audio record the interview to have an accurate record of what is said; we will not record any video of this call. We may contact you

after the interview to ask for clarification. We will not allow anyone outside the research team, which includes staff from the Urban Institute, Abt Associates, and other HUD contractors to listen to the audio recordings or review the notes we take. We will make every effort to protect your privacy to the extent permitted by law, but if we think you are at risk of harm, we may need to notify someone. Only the people doing the research will see any information that identifies you personally and we will destroy the recording, transcript, and notes at the conclusion of the project, which we anticipate will be in 2028.

Themes across all the conversations we are having will be published in a report to HUD. When we write our reports and discuss our findings, the answers you provide during an interview will be combined with answers from many individuals. We never share any information that identifies you or any other respondents by name outside of our research team. However, we may identify the neighborhood your properties are in, and the location could allow an individual to indirectly attribute a statement to you. We make every effort to avoid this, but you should be aware of the possibility.

Do you have any questions about the study or today's discussion? [*Pause for response and address any questions*]

Do you agree to participate? [*Pause for response*]

Do you grant us permission to record the interview? [*Pause for response*]

Thank you, we are going to begin recording now.

[*If permission is granted*] The recorder is now on.

Do you have any questions before we continue?

OK, let's start.

BACKGROUND (ALL RESPONDENTS)

Please tell me about yourself and your work as a property owner/property manager.

1. How should we refer to you?

   Probes: an investor, landlord, property owner, property manager?

2. How long have you been an owner of rental properties/a property manager?

   a. What led you to get into the property rental business?

3. To help us understand differences in landlords' experiences, it is helpful to have some context. Can you tell me how many rental units you own/manage?

   It sometimes helps if I write down each of your property/properties and we can talk more about them one at a time:

   a. Where are they located?

      Probes: city, region, specific neighborhoods?

   b. What types of properties are they?

      Probes: apartments in duplexes or multifamily homes, single-family homes?

The next questions will help me decide which questions in the guide are relevant to your experience.

4. Do you currently rent to tenants with standard HCV or Section 8 vouchers?

   a. [*If no*] Have you rented to housing choice voucher (HCV) or Section 8 tenants in the past?

   b. [*If yes*] About what percentage of your units are typically occupied by tenants with an HCV or Section 8 voucher? [*If trouble estimating the percentage*] About how many of your units are typically occupied by tenants with a voucher?

      i. Are there units that you rent exclusively to voucher tenants? Tell me all about that.

      ii. Are there units you don't rent to voucher tenants? Tell me all about that.

5. Do you currently rent to any tenants who participate in [MOBILITY PROGRAM]?

   a. [*If yes*] How many [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenants do you currently have in your property/properties?

   b. [*If yes*] About how long have you been renting to [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenants?

   c. [*If no*] Have you rented to any [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenants in the past?

HCV PROGRAM EXPERIENCE (LANDLORDS WITH HCV/SECTION 8 EXPERIENCE)

[*Ask these questions of landlords who are currently renting to tenants with a Housing Choice Voucher/Section 8 or who have rented to such tenants in the past (Q4 or Q4a = "Yes").*]

As we mentioned, we're really interested in landlords' experiences with the HCV or Section 8 program, positive and negative, and anything in between. [*If Q5 = Yes*] I'll ask about your tenants in [MOBILITY PROGRAM] later. Right now, I'd like to focus on the voucher program.

You said you rent or have rented to voucher tenants.

6. Tell me about your experience with and understanding of the HCV or Section 8 program.
    a. Does the program set the amount of rent you can charge your tenants? What is that process?

        Probes: For particular areas? For particular units?

    b. Tell me about the logistics involved with renting to a tenant with a voucher. Take me through the whole process.
        i. What are the rules and regulations that make renting to these tenants different from renting to market-rate tenants?

            Probes: At lease up, during tenancy, annual releasing, evictions

        ii. How are you paid for units occupied by tenants with housing vouchers? How is this process different for tenants without a voucher?

        iii. When are you paid the rent?

        iv. What have you done, or would you do if a tenant doesn't pay their portion? Does this differ for tenants without a voucher?

7. [*If 4.i., 4.ii* = Yes] You said that you manage some of your units especially for the voucher program. Do you advertise specifically to tenants with vouchers for some units?
    a. Tell me what makes those units better candidates for a voucher tenant.

    b. How about units you do not market or rent to voucher tenants? What makes those units better for tenants without a voucher?

    Probes: Rent caps, housing location, neighborhood, housing condition?

8. Tell me about your experience renting to HCV or Section 8 voucher tenants, for example, experience with length of tenure, unit upkeep?
    a. Tell me about any advantages of renting to people with vouchers?

        Probes: Assurance you will get rent, tenant characteristics, tenants already screened, rent amount paid?

    b. How about any downsides to renting to people with vouchers?

        Probes: Government intervention, tenants, bureaucracy, inspections?

9. Has your experience with voucher tenants been different in any way from tenants who do not use vouchers? [*If yes]* Give me an example.

10. [*If rented to tenants with a standard HCV or Section 8 voucher in the past and does not currently*] You said you used to rent to people with vouchers, but don't now. We would love to know more about this. What led you to decide not to rent to voucher holders?

    Probes: Experience with the PHA, rents, tenants, other concerns?

MOBILITY PROGRAM EXPERIENCE (MOBILITY PROGRAM LANDLORDS)

[*Ask these questions of landlords who are currently renting to mobility program participants, or who have rented to mobility program participants in the past (Q5 or Q5c = "Yes").*]

The next set of questions shift from the HCV or Section 8 voucher program to your experience with [MOBILITY PROGRAM], and what it is like working with the program.

11. How did you first learn about [MOBILITY PROGRAM]?

    Probes: Learned from a tenant, a mobility services staff member, PHA staff, word of mouth?

    a. What were your initial impressions of [MOBILITY PROGRAM]?

       Probes: Willing to participate, reservations, didn't know the difference with standard HCV?

12. How much do you/your staff interact with [MOBILITY PROGRAM] staff?

    a. [*If interacts with staff*] What do you interact with [MOBILITY PROGRAM] staff about?

    Probes: Interact at different stages of the process (search and application, lease-up, post-move); information about the voucher; discussions about lease/tenants; inspections; use of any incentives or financial incentives; post-move check-ins?

13. How helpful or useful have you found/did you find the [MOBILITY PROGRAM] to be?

14. Tell us what aspect of the MOBILITY PROGRAM is/was most helpful to you?

15. Did any of the families who participate in [MOBILITY PROGRAM] prepare a tenant resume or cover letter when they applied for housing that described their background and why they would be a good tenant?

    a. [*If yes*] What did the letters talk about?

       Probes: children, credit, eviction history, employment, recovery, the importance of housing for their family goals?

    b. [*If yes*] How did the rental resume affect/change your impressions of the tenant (if at all)? OR How effective was the rental resume?

16. We understand that the [MOBILITY PROGRAM] offers a streamlined housing inspection process. How does that process work?

17. We understand that the [MOBILITY PROGRAM] provides a signing bonus to owners for leasing to a participant. Tell us anything you've heard about that.

a. [*If landlord has rented to a family in the mobility program*] Have you ever received a signing bonus for participating in the [MOBILITY PROGRAM]? Tell us how that worked.

b. [*If the landlord has received a sign-up bonus*] How long did the process take to receive the bonus?

c. [*If the landlord is familiar with the bonus but has not received it yet*] How much is the bonus for (if you know)?

18. The [MOBILITY PROGRAM] will pay a holding fee to help protect the owner in the event a voucher family does not follow through and rent a unit which the owner has agreed to hold for them. Are you familiar with this policy?

    a. Have you ever requested or received a holding fee for tenants in the mobility program?

    b. Tell us how that worked.

19. The [MOBILITY PROGRAM] has a damage mitigation fund to help protect owners from damage to the unit. Have you submitted any claims to this fund?

    a. [*If they have used the fund*] Tell me how that process worked.

        i. Who did you work with?

        ii. How long did it take to process?

    b. [*If they have used it*] How well would you say it worked for you?

20. [MOBILITY PROGRAM] offers tenants assistance with their security deposit upon request. Tell me about any of your tenants getting security deposits from the [MOBILITY PROGRAM]. How did that work for you?

21. How do the services/incentives I've asked about shape your decision to rent or consider renting to tenants participating in the [MOBILITY PROGRAM]?

    a. Which services/incentives are most appealing? Which are less important to you? Which services are missing that you would find really helpful?

22. [*If landlord rents to standard HCV tenants (Q4 or 4a = Yes)]* How does the process of leasing to tenants in [MOBILITY PROGRAM] compare with leasing to tenants with an HCV or Section 8 voucher who are not a part of the [MOBILITY PROGRAM]?

    a. What about inspections? How does the process for tenants in the [MOBILITY PROGRAM] compare with other HCV or Section 8 voucher tenants? Is it the same?

    b. What about dealing with [PHA/PHAs]? How does that process differ for [MOBILITY PROGRAM]?

EXPERIENCE WITH MOBILITY PROGRAM TENANTS (MOBILITY PROGRAM LANDLORDS)

[*Ask these questions of landlords who are currently renting to mobility program participants or who have rented to mobility program participants in the past (Q5 or Q5c = "Yes").*]

For the next set of questions, we'll shift from the [MOBILITY PROGRAM] processes to your experience with [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenants.

23. How are your [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenants doing in their units?

    Probes: No issues/some issues with behavior, upkeep, length of tenure; training and preparation for tenancy through the program?

24. Has there been a time when you had any issues with your [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenant? What happened?

    a. [*If yes*] How was it resolved?

       Probes: Interaction with mobility program staff, the local housing authority, etc.?

    b. [*If yes*] How did the mobility program or housing authority help resolve it?

25. Have you experienced turnover with any of the tenants participating in [MOBILITY PROGRAM]?

    a. [*If yes*] Take me through the story of how they left and what happened.

    b. [*If yes]* What interactions did you have with staff at [MOBILITY PROGRAM] about it?

    c. [*If yes*] Have you continued renting to tenants participating in the [MOBILITY PROGRAM] after the initial [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenant left? Tell me more about that.

26. Tell me about any advantages of renting to [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenants. Give me an example.

    Probes: Program staff, signing bonus or holding fee, other services or incentives, assurance that you will get the rent on time, government intervention, tenant characteristics?

27. Tell me about any downsides of renting to [MOBILITY PROGRAM] tenants?

    a. Has there been a time when you were frustrated with [MOBILITY PROGRAM] with regard to your dealings with tenants? Can you tell me more about that? What would have helped at that time?

    Probes: Program staff, service quality, support and communication, application and approval process, inspections, administrative delays, small area FMRs, tenant damages, leases?

28. Looking forward, would you be willing to rent to more tenants from [MOBILITY PROGRAM]? Why or why not?

    a. What would make you more likely to rent to MOBILITY PROGRAM tenants?

PERCEPTIONS OF HCV PROGRAM (LANDLORDS WITH NO HCV/SECTION 8 PROGRAM EXPERIENCE)

[*Ask these questions of landlords who are have never rented to tenants who used a Housing Choice/Section 8 Voucher (Q4 and Q4a = "No").*]

You said you've never rented to a Housing Choice or Section 8 voucher tenant. I'd like to know more about your thoughts on the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) or Section 8 program so we can learn how to improve it.

29. Have you ever been approached by a potential tenant with an HCV or Section 8 voucher?

    a. [*If yes*] About how frequently have you been approached by a person with an HCV or Section 8 voucher?

    b. [*If yes*] Tell me about the last time you were approached by a person with an HCV or Section 8 voucher. How did that go? Why did you end up not renting to them?

       Probes: Decided not to participate; declined to follow-up; issues related to HCV or Section 8 voucher program (rent cap, inspection process, occupancy); issues related to the tenant/family (income, debit/credit, background, deposit issues)?

30. Have you heard that there are any advantages or disadvantages to renting to HCV or Section 8 voucher tenants? Tell me about that.

    a. What are the advantages?

       Probes: Assurance you will get rent on time, tenant characteristics?

    b. What about the disadvantages?

       Probes: Tenants, bureaucracy, inspections, lost rent/money while waiting for unit approval?

    c. How likely are you to rent to an HCV or Section 8 voucher tenant in the future?

    d. What would need to change about the program for you to rent to an HCV or Section 8 voucher tenant, or list your units through the program?

       Probes: support for tenant leasing, access to a damage mitigation fund, landlord signing bonus, post-move check-in supports?

31. Do you have any concerns about participating in the HCV or Section 8 voucher program?

    a. What could be done to alleviate those concerns?

MOBILITY PROGRAM KNOWLEDGE (LANDLORDS WITHOUT MOBILITY PROGRAM EXPERIENCE)

[*Ask these questions of landlords who have never rented to mobility program participants (Q5 and Q5c = "No").*]

32. Has anyone reached out to talk to you about the [MOBILITY PROGRAM]?

    a. [*If yes*] How did they reach out to you? Tell me more about how they contacted you and what they shared about the program.

       Probes: Shared information, invited you to attend a training/education session, shared tools to market your units to HCV or Section 8 voucher tenants, shared information about program incentives for landlords?

33. [*If contacted about the mobility program*] How helpful was the information that was shared with you?

    a. How did the information affect your interest in renting to program participants?

    b. Tell me about any reservations you had with the mobility program that the outreach/interaction did not address.

REFLECTIONS (ALL RESPONDENTS)

For the last couple of questions, I'd like to ask you to reflect on the mobility Demonstration and the voucher program overall.

34. What do you think of the [MOBILITY PROGRAM] overall?

    a. What was shared with you about the goals of the program? What do you think about that?

35. One of the goals of [MOBILITY PROGRAM] is to help families move to safe neighborhoods with good schools that will help them and their children to thrive. What do you think about that?

    a. [*If MOBILITY PROGRAM landlord*] How do you see your role in supporting the goals of the mobility program as a landlord?

36. [*If MOBILITY PROGRAM landlord*] What do you think is working well with [MOBILITY PROGRAM] so far?

    a. What do you think could be done to make [MOBILITY PROGRAM] more effective?

37. [*NON-MOBILITY PROGRAM landlord only*] The mobility program offers households pre-move coaching, deposit and other moving-related costs, a holding fee, and a damage mitigation fund. Which of these services, if any, would be helpful to you in renting to families using a voucher?

    a. Which of these services, if any, would make a difference for you in deciding whether to rent a property to a family using a housing voucher?

38. What could be done to make the regular HCV or Section 8 voucher program more effective?

CLOSING (ALL RESPONDENTS)

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I have just a few more questions.

39. Is there anything that I did not ask about [MOBILITY PROGRAM] or the Housing Choice Voucher program that is important for us to understand?

40. What else should we understand about being about being a [LANDLORD/PROPERTY OWNER] in this housing market?

41. Do you have any final questions for me about the study, or about the research team?

Thank you for your time. We will now turn off the recorder.