Interview Guide for Opportunity Area Landlords

INSTRUCTIONS FOR INTERVIEWERS

This interview guide is intended for landlords, property owners or property managers, who have units in opportunity areas and who have interacted with mobility services staff and who may or may not have previous experience with the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. Make every effort to cover all questions in the guide and probe for in-depth responses.

How to use probes and prompts: *Probes* should be used if the respondent's answer does not cover the topics listed in the probes. *Prompts* should be used when a respondent isn't sure how to answer a question or seems unsure about what the question is asking. If a respondent provides an answer to a question, whether or not they include mention of the items listed as prompts, then the interviewer should not use the prompts.

Informed Consent:

- Prior to arriving for in-person interviews, print a copy of the appropriate consent form for each respondent.
- Offer the landlord the option of reading this consent form aloud or to themselves. If the landlord opts to read it to themselves, please verbally recap the key points with the respondent to ensure that they understand.
- Provide a copy of the consent form to the landlord for their records. For in-person interviews this should be a hard copy and for virtual interviews, this should be sent via email.
- The following instructions do not need to be read aloud to respondent but prior to the interview, this information should be shared as appropriate:

If you would like translated materials, or to complete the interview in language other than English, please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate you. If you need information to be presented in an accessible format, for example, Braille, audio, large type, or sign language interpreters, or need a reasonable accommodation (a change or adjustment) so that you can participate, please let us know. Please feel free to ask me any questions you might have. We will also [email/give] you a copy of this information. We will also email/give you a copy of this information.

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>. Please feel free to ask me any questions you might have as I move through the introduction.

Before we begin, I want to tell you a few things about this study and your participation in it.

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) program. The research team is led by Abt Global, and other researchers, including the Urban Institute. The purpose of the study is to determine whether mobility-related services are effective in helping families with a Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) move to higher-opportunity, lower-poverty neighborhoods.

As part of this study, we are talking with landlords in the local housing market, staff from Public Housing Agencies (PHAs), mobility service providers, and households who are participating in the Demonstration. We will ask you questions about what it's like to be a landlord/property manager/owner, and your thoughts on the Demonstration. We estimate the interview will last about one hour. At the end of the interview, you will receive a $30 gift card.

Your participation in the interview is voluntary. You can choose not to answer questions, and you can choose to end the conversation at any time. We hope that you will be candid about your experiences with the Demonstration. We are not evaluating your work as a landlord.

We will be conducting interviews again in the future and may reach out to you in a future year.

During the interview, [NAME/I] will be taking detailed notes; we will not identify your name in our notes. With your permission, I/we will audio record the interview to have an accurate record of what is said as a back-up to my/our notes; we will not record any video. I/we may contact you after the interview to ask for clarification. No one outside the research team will be allowed to listen to the audio recordings or review the notes. 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.

What we learn from all the interviews will be published in reports to HUD. When we write our reports and discuss 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.

The questions in this interview have been reviewed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. The information requested under this collection is fully protected and kept private to the extent possible according to the Privacy Act of 1974.

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]*

Are you comfortable with this interview being recorded? *[Pause for response]*

Thank you, we are going to turn on the audio recorder now.

The audio recorder is now on.

Do you have any questions before we continue?

OK, let's start.

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today.

The Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This collection of information is voluntary and will be used to evaluate the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Choice Demonstration. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 90 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering, and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number and expiration date for this collection are OMB #: 2528-0337, Exp: 12/31/2026. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Anna P. Guido at Anna.P.Guido@hud.gov or call at 202-402-5535.

BACKGROUND (ALL RESPONDENTS)

First, we would like to hear a bit about you and your work as a property owner/property manager.

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

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

2. Tell me about the properties you own/manage now.

    a. How many rental units do you own/manage?

    b. Where are they located?
    Probes: city, region, specific neighborhoods

    c. What types of properties are they?

    Probes: smaller apartment complexes like duplexes, triplexes, larger multifamily properties, or single-family homes

3. [*If not property manager*] How should we refer to you?
Prompts: an investor, a landlord, property owner, etc.

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

4. Do you currently rent to families with housing vouchers?

    a. [*If no*] Have you rented to tenants with housing vouchers in the past?

    b. [*If yes*] About what percentage/how many of your units are typically occupied by families with a voucher?

    c. [*If yes*] Are there units that you rent exclusively to voucher tenants? Tell me about that.

    d. [*If yes*] Are there units you don't rent to voucher tenants? Tell me about that.

    e. Do you participate in any other housing assistance or subsidy programs as a landlord/owner/investor?

5. Do you currently rent to any tenants who participate in Community Choice Demonstration?

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

b. [*If yes*] About how long have you been renting to Community Choice Demonstration tenants?

c. [*If no*] Have you rented to any Community Choice Demonstration tenants in the past?

HCV PROGRAM EXPERIENCE (LANDLORDS WITH HCV EXPERIENCE)

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

As we mentioned, we're really interested in landlords' experiences with the Housing Choice Voucher program, positive and negative, and anything in between. You may also know the Housing Choice Voucher program as Section 8. For this interview, we'll be referring to this program as "the voucher program".

6. I'm interested in hearing about your experience renting to voucher **tenants.**

   a. Tell me about the advantages of renting to people with vouchers.
   Prompts: Assurance you will get rent, rent amount paid, tenant characteristics, tenants already screened, unit upkeep?
   b. How about any downsides to renting to people with vouchers?
   Prompts: Government intervention, inspections, timing of leasing up and moving, delays in the leasing process, tenants, unit upkeep?

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

8. We know that some landlords manage some of their units especially for the voucher program and others don't do it like that. How about you? Do you advertise specifically to tenants with vouchers for some units?

   a. [*If yes*] Tell me what makes those units better candidates for a voucher tenant.

   b. Do you have units that you do not market or rent to voucher tenants.
      i. [*If yes*] Can you tell me about why you don't rent those units to voucher tenants?
   Prompts: Rent caps, housing location, neighborhood, housing condition?

9. [*If rented to standard HCV in the past and does not currently*] You said you used to rent to people with vouchers, but don't now. Can you tell me why you no longer rent to people with vouchers?
   Probes: Experience with the PHA, rents, tenants, other concerns?

10. Are there elements of the voucher program that you find confusing or have questions about?" [*If yes*] Tell me more about those?

MOBILITY PROGRAM EXPERIENCE (MOBILITY PROGRAM LANDLORDS)

[*Ask these questions of landlords who are currently renting to mobility program participants, or who have rented to program participants in the past (Q*5 *or Q*5*c = "Yes")*]

Let's talk about your experience with Community Choice Demonstration specifically, and what it is like working with the program.

11. [*If not interviewed in first* round] How did you learn about Community Choice Demonstration?
    a. Tell me how you first became aware of the program.
    Prompts: Learned from a tenant, a mobility services staff member / PHA staff, word of mouth?

    b. What were your initial impressions of Community Choice Demonstration?
    Prompts: Willing to participate, reservations, didn't know the difference with standard HCV?

12. How much do you/your staff interact with Community Choice Demonstration staff?

    a. [*If interacts with staff*] Tell me about how you have been in contact with Community Choice Demonstration staff.
        i. What do you interact with them about?
        Prompts: Information about the voucher, discussions about lease/tenants, inspections, use of any incentives or financial incentives, post-move check-ins?

12. Did any of the families who participate in Community Choice Demonstration prepare a tenant resumé 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?
    b. [*If yes*] How did the rental resumé affect your impressions of the tenant, if at all?

13. We understand that the Community Choice Demonstration offers a streamlined housing inspection process. Have you had experience with the streamlined process?

    a. [*If* yes] Tell me about your experience with that process.

14. We understand that the Community Choice Demonstration may provide a signing bonus to owners for signing a lease with a participant.

a. [*If landlord has rented to a family in the mobility program]* Have you ever received a signing bonus for participating in the Community Choice Demonstration?

i. [*If yes*] Can you tell me about how that worked?
Probe: How long did it take to receive the bonus?

15. The Community Choice Demonstration may pay a holding fee to help protect the owner in the event a voucher tenant does not follow through and rent a unit which the owner has agreed to hold for them. Are you familiar with this policy?

a. [*If yes*] Have you ever requested or received a holding fee for families in the voucher program?

i. Tell me about that experience.

16. The Community Choice Demonstration has a damage mitigation fund to help protect owners from damage to the unit. Have you submitted any claims?

a. [*If yes*] Tell me how that process worked.

i. Who did you work with?

ii. How long did it take to process?

iii. How well would you say it worked for you?

17. Community Choice Demonstration offers families assistance with their security deposit upon request. Have any of your tenants received help with their security deposit from the Community Choice Demonstration?

a. [*If yes*] How did that work for you?

18. How do the Demonstration services and incentives shape your decision to rent or consider renting to families participating in the Community Choice Demonstration?

a. Which services or incentives are most appealing?
b. Which are less important to you?
c. Are there services or incentives not offered that you would find helpful?

19. [*If landlord rents to standard HCV tenants (Q4 or Q4a - "Yes")*] How does the process of leasing up families in Community Choice Demonstration compare with leasing up families with a voucher who are not a part of the Community Choice Demonstration?

a. Tell me more about that.
    i. What differences, if any, stand out to you?

b. What about inspections - how does the process for Community Choice Demonstration tenants compare with the process for other tenants with housing vouchers?

c. How does dealing with the [PHA/PHAs] when it concerns the Community Choice Demonstration differ from dealing with the [PHA/PHAs] about other tenants with housing vouchers?

EXPERIENCE WITH MOBILITY PROGRAM TENANTS (MOBILITY PROGRAM LANDLORDS)

[*Ask these questions of landlords who currently rent to mobility program participants or who have rented to mobility program participants in the past (Q*5 *or Q*5*c = "Yes")*]

Next, we would like to learn more about your experience with Community Choice Demonstration tenants.

20. How are your Community Choice Demonstration tenants doing in their units?

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

21. Have you had any issues with a Community Choice Demonstration tenant?

a. [*If yes*] What happened?

    i. How was it resolved?

22. Have you experienced turnover with any family participating in Community Choice Demonstration?

a. [*If yes*] Take me through the story of what happened.
b. [*If yes]* What interactions did you have with Community Choice Demonstration staff about this tenant's departure?

23. Tell me about any advantages of renting to Community Choice Demonstration tenants.

a. Can you give me an example?

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

24. Tell me about any downsides of renting to Community Choice Demonstration tenants?

a. Has there been a time when you were frustrated with Community Choice Demonstration?

i. [*If yes*] Can you tell me more about that?

ii. What would have helped alleviate your frustration at that time?

25. Looking forward, would you be willing to rent to another family from Community Choice Demonstration?

a. Why or why not?
b. What would make you more likely to rent to Community Choice Demonstration tenants in the future?

PERCEPTIONS OF HCV PROGRAM (LANDLORDS WITH *NO* HCV PROGRAM EXPERIENCE)

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

You said you've never rented to a voucher family. I'd like to know more about your thoughts on the voucher program so we can learn how to improve it.

26. Have you ever been approached by a potential tenant with a voucher?

a. [*If yes*] About how frequently have you been approached by a person with a voucher?

b. [*If yes*] Tell me about the last time you were approached by a person with a voucher. How did that go?

i. Why did you end up not renting to them?

Probes: Issues related to voucher program (rent cap, inspection process, occupancy?) Issues related to the tenant/family (income, debit/credit, background, deposit issues?)

27. Have you heard that there are any advantages or disadvantages to renting to tenants with housing vouchers tenants?

a. What are the advantages?

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

b. What about the disadvantages?

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

c. How likely are you to rent to a voucher tenant in the future?

d. What would need to change about the program for you to rent to a 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?

28. What concerns, if any, do you have about participating in the 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 (Q*5 *and Q*5*c = "No"). Probe as necessary to understand the reasons or concerns affecting the landlord's willingness to rent to a mobility program household.*]

29. Has anyone reached out to you to share information about the [*if applicable*] voucher program, or talk to you about the Community Choice Demonstration?

a. [*If yes*] How did they reach out to you?
   i. What did they share about the program?

Prompts: Invited you to attend a training/education session, discussed ways to market your units to voucher tenants, shared information about program incentives for landlords?

30. [*If has been contacted about the 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 voucher or mobility program that the interaction did not address.

REFLECTIONS (ALL RESPONDENTS)

For the last couple of questions, I'd like to ask you to share your overall thoughts about the Community Choice Demonstration.

31. What do you think of the Community Choice Demonstration overall?

a. What was shared with you about the goal of the program?

b. What do you think about that?

32. One of the goals of Community Choice Demonstration 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 achieving that goal as a landlord participating in the program?

33. [*If MOBILITY PROGRAM landlord*] What do you think is working well with Community Choice Demonstration so far?

    a. What do you think could be done to make Community Choice Demonstration more effective?

34. What could be done to make the standard 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.

35. Is there anything that I did not ask about Community Choice Demonstration or the voucher program that is important for me to understand?

36. What else should I know about being about being a [LANDLORD/PROPERTY OWNER] in this housing market that is important for me understand?

37. 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.