

## Revised Area Survey Procedures

**Background** – Since the mid-1990s, HUD has relied on the use of random digit dialing (RDD) telephone surveys to collect current rental information to supplement the data available to calculated Fair Market Rents (FMRs) for specific areas. However, the costs for collecting these data were increasing while the reliability of the data decreased. There is increased screening out of unrecognized numbers which increase the sample and time required for telephone surveys. And, while HUD is allowed to collect data from telephone surveys even from those telephone numbers registered under the Do Not Call list, the respondent is not aware of this and getting randomly selected respondents to participate is very difficult.

**Rent Survey Study** – There were two main issues the study had to solve: (1) to obtain rent data as cheaply as possible, and (2) to make sure this data was not biased in any way. This study looked at mail, telephone and web-based rental surveys. The telephone surveys were comprised of both cell phones (30%) and landline phones (70%). HUD had never included cell phones before, and so a large part of the rental market, those without landlines, was not being reached. Adding cell phones however, was more expensive since more time had to be spent hand-dialing the telephone numbers. Pre-notification mailings were tested for both the telephone and mail surveys. Web-based surveys were provided as an option under selected mail and telephone surveys.

HUD tested telephone versus mail survey results by selecting two similar economic/demographic/geographic areas and comparing the survey results. The surveys were conducted in this way to avoid overburdening residents with requests for survey participation, having samples overlap, or contaminating the results from two different survey methods. Columbia, SC and Charleston, SC were one pair and Fort Wayne, IN and Peoria, IL were another pair. The mail surveys, conducted in Charleston, SC and Fort Wayne, IN provided the best results, in terms of both cost and lack of survey bias. For the future HUD will focus on mail surveys, using telephone surveys only when there is a significant time constraint.

**Changes to Survey Methodology** – In addition to the change in the way most surveys are conducted, HUD revised and simplified the questionnaire used for these surveys. Changes were made to simplify and clarify the introduction, to reduce the number of times a respondent is asked the rent, to simplify the utility questions, and to clarify the public housing questions. In addition, to make this data more comparable to the methodology changes in the use of ACS data, only 100 recent mover completes are being required. Previously HUD had required 200 2-bedroom recent mover completes for its telephone surveys, but to get these results too much time and money must be spent. The mail surveys can provide 100 recent mover results at a reasonable price. In this, the first year of surveys under the new methodology, we will get a better understanding of the survey costs.

**Large and Small PHA Methodology** - There will no longer be a difference between the methodology used for large and small PHAs. HUD will only conduct surveys for large metropolitan areas under extreme economic conditions. Large metropolitan areas are covered by one-year ACS data, with a lag of 2 years. The recent mover period in the HUD survey is a 2-year period, so the

HUD survey would cover a comparable period as the ACS rent data, but there would be far fewer observations. HUD would have to reduce the recent mover period to make the results show a more current period than the ACS, and this would greatly increase the cost of the survey.

Small PHAs may be able to conduct surveys for less money, currently estimated at \$25,000 to \$35,000. Changes to the methodology, or requests by small PHAs to conduct a county-group survey should be discussed with HUD staff at the HQ division of Economic Market Analysis.

All questions on surveys should be directed to Marie Lihn of the HQ Economic Market Analysis Division at [marie.l.lihn@hud.gov](mailto:marie.l.lihn@hud.gov), or telephone: 202-402-5866.