2017-2018 ConnectHome
Using HUD Form-50058 for ConnectHome Data Collection and Reporting, 12/18/18

Dina Lehman-Kim: Thank you, Brianna. Good afternoon, everyone. This is Dina Lehman-Kim. I manage the ConnectHome program at HUD. And I'm happy to welcome you all today to this presentation.

As you all I'm sure know, data tracking is really important for gauging how well you're doing. And I'm sure you've come across many different types of products that you can purchase to do data tracking and outcome measurement. But the one we're going to talk about today is not only free, but it's something that your housing authority should know very well. It's the form 50058, also known as the Family Form. And the methodology to use it should also be very familiar to your PHA.

And so without further ado I'd like to introduce the speakers who will go over the form itself and how it can be used for ConnectHome specifically, and another speaker who's going to talk about how they are actually using it. So Dylan Sweeney is first up. He is a program analyst in HUD's policy development and research office. And I like to say that he's the ConnectHome data guru. And then we have Charlie Francis, who is the assistant director of leased housing and rental services for the Rhode Island Housing Authority. So without further ado I will turn it over now to Dylan. And thank you very much.

Dylan Sweeney: Thank you, Dina. And thank you to all of you who have come here for this webinar. It's really huge to have the opportunity to sort of add to the collection of data about this topic generally. And hopefully after this presentation you guys will be excited and we can sort of get to really learning a lot about connectivity and serving people with internet connections. I'm not certain that I have control over the slides. Oh, I lied, I do.

Okay. So special thanks to Charlie and the team at Rhode Island as well, and then to EveryoneOn. But first off I don't know how many of you guys have seen the report, but there are a lot of questions about how many people in our communities that we serve are actually connected to the internet and in what ways are they connected to the internet. Our first attempt to answer this question came right when we were establishing ConnectHome in 2016.

We surveyed nine communities and we found that only 34 percent of households in the surveyed communities had internet connections. That has been sort of the baseline number that we have been using ever since. If you look to the right you can see that there are a lot more than nine communities involved with the ConnectHome program now. So we are trying to move forward with some new approaches to learn a little bit more about this policy topic and the communities that we're serving.

So when we're talking about knowing, we are often talking about data. We have two big groups of data that we can use to examine this program. We have connection information that's provided

to us by internet service providers who are connecting households through the ConnectHome program.

And then we have the PHA information that's already sort of being collected through all the various data processes and onerous paperwork that HUD makes you file. Unfortunately we don't actually have any way of linking these two pieces of information. Because we just have it at the citywide level and then we have it at the PHA level. What we would need to do to link is to link it at a household or an individual level.

So our big challenge is that data are insufficient, that ISP information is just tracking total ports, so we don't know how many people are in those households, we don't know the age of the people in those households, or anything else about them. Surveys are slow and can take a long time to administer.

And there are other types of services that we're trying to provide in this program that go beyond just getting home internet connection -- measuring device access, digital literacy, all these different types of sort of softer issues.

So we came up with a plan and we partnered with Rhode Island Housing to come up with a new approach that would help us to establish a baseline, to monitor implementation, and continuing progress through the ConnectHome program, and to detect the impact both in the short term, and medium term, and even potentially long term of providing folks with internet access.

This is actually groundbreaking research that we've been able to do with Rhode Island Housing and that hopefully you guys can join in and engage with. It allows us to link this topic of internet access to education, healthcare access, public services, of all the sort of dimensions of our online lives. We can now relate that to individuals that we're serving. So the question is, how does this work?

So Dina mentioned that there are some expensive services that we can buy. We could've done a survey. But we were looking for something that would be as quick and easy to implement as possible, and that wouldn't require a lot of paperwork or any additional work at all really. So we wanted to use preexisting reporting structures. We wanted it to already be private and secure so that we could look at individual level data. And we were hoping to make it as minimally expensive as possible so that we could attract the most potential partners.

So we decided that the way that we were going to do that is to use, like Dina said, the Family Form, the form 50058. Each one of these reports on page two has a couple of fields, 2Q through 2U, that are listed as PHA use only. Depending on your organization you may already be using some of these fields. But we wanted to take advantage of their existence to give you guys a quick and easy way to provide data back up to us through preexisting 50058 reporting structure.

So the advantages of using this form are that it's random assignment, which means that in each quarter that we get an update of our 50058 database and the PIC database, those individuals who recertified during that quarter can be considered to be randomly assigned, which means we can track progress from quarter to quarter, and we can see changes in our populations and the effect

of our service in much more granular detail, in just a single point survey or doing an annual survey.

Second, it 100 percent adoption. So every household has to fill one of these surveys out. So we don't have to worry about finding an effective sample size. Obviously there's the low cost. Then one of the big advantages is that it is inherently linked to the other information that is collected through that form. So we will have things like family size, employment status, income, tenancy duration, all of that really important household level information we will now have a permanent way of linked to the information that we collect in those forms. And there's no additional paperwork or reporting to fill out. You just fill in the responses into that box and it gets submitted right up to us.

So you may be familiar with the survey form. It looks a little bit like this. I don't think we need to linger too much on it. But what we did is we designed a series of questions to fit into each of the fields. 2Q is sort of a hardware and connections question set. 2R are the outcomes questions. 2S are program service questions. 2T digital inclusion. And 2U contact information. So each of these fields is limited in the number of characters it can contain. So we tried to group similar topics together so that we could get snapshots of how internet connectivity is affecting each of these sort of dimensions that we expect to see changes in.

Each possible answer has within one of those fields has a unique letter combination and a unique number combination. So that way it is easy to ensure that you are not messing up this difficult reporting framework. Because each potential answer just has one letter that you could put in. And the order does matter, but potentially just make sure that there aren't any duplications or missed entries. The final field, the contact information, is slightly different. And that's just to collect information for potential later follow up. So it's not the highest priority.

We designed the field to -- or the survey to output into CSV data. This is an example of CSV data. It sort of looks like kind of like gobbledygook. The thing to remember is that CSV just stands for comma separated value, and that just means that for each entry you just then put a comma after it. And that denotes that it's a different field. So you'll just put in an answer like A or B or C, and then follow it with a comma before you put in your second answer.

So this is an example of the survey that we developed with Rhode Island. These are going to be available to you verbatim along with some of their transcription options. Here you can sort of see how it's divided into the questions, and that each question has a set of answers with one letter that corresponds to that answer. And so you would just ask the question related to field 2Q, and then -- or ask the series of questions within that field, enter in the letter that corresponds to the response, and then just key in a comma before you answer the next question. And that way you can actually take down a bunch of sort of long survey answers in very simple short keystroke answers.

So for instance, if you have the question, do you have in home internet broadband service? This is the first question that's on the survey. You could simply answer just A, B or C. Those letters won't be repeated within the field, so the next question will have D, E or F as your potential answers. But you just pick one of those letters, and then type it in, followed by a comma. So here

we have sample 2Q answers for, yes, the respondent has in home broadband services, yes, the respondent has a laptop, and yes, the respondent received internet between six months and one year ago.

So these are sort of the plain English answers that you might expect to get. And here's actually how it would look encoded in the form. So A, comma, D, comma, H. So that actually hopefully frees you guys up from the burden of having to enter in any long answers. And also helps on our end with sort of pulling those survey answers back out.

The final field, field 2U, where you enter in some of the contact information, that field is long enough that it allows us to enter in some of these larger answers, just followed by a comma. Once again this is sort of the final field. It's not as important as the other fields, but it does provide us with the potential to follow up if we were to do a survey later on to get even more in depth than this allows. Obviously for each of these answers there is the potential that people choose to not answer or don't know an answer. And all of those potentialities are also included in the optional responses.

There are some questions about how internet access or lack of internet access enables individuals to access their benefits. And we know asking about benefits can be uncomfortable. And we don't want any residents to feel pressure about how they need to answer. And we want to make sure that it's very clear at all levels that none of these responses related to these surveys will be used in any way on a personal level to affect participation or eligibility.

All of these answers are voluntary and will exist only for the purposes of providing data for internet connectivity issues. And so that's sort of the meat and potatoes for how to fill out the form. I'm sure there will be follow up questions at the end about how to do it precisely. And we will be providing the documentation on how to do it specifically for each question.

I wanted to then sort of pass it off to Charlie, who's been our partner at Rhode Island. He's actually run this at the local level. And so he will have perhaps a little bit more to say about how to administer the program. Thank you, guys.

Charlie Francis: Thanks, Dylan. Yeah, happy to talk to everyone. Thanks for joining today. Just stop me if you can't hear me, but it seems okay. So we started doing this effort about a year ago. We are working with two -- so we are the state housing finance agency. We do a lot of different things including mortgages and development. But like many state housing finance agencies, we also operate a housing choice voucher program within our agency. And so that's the housing authority portion of our agency.

So us and two other PHAs in Rhode Island, the Providence and Pawtucket Housing Authorities, are working together as a ConnectHome site. Providence has since received its own designation as well, but we're still working together.

And so as part of that work, I believe it was Dylan who originally approached us about this 50058 data collection effort that HUD was starting to think about. And thought it was a great

idea because, again, collecting data through a process that every tenant has to go through, you're going to get a 100 percent response rate, which is almost unheard of.

So we're pretty excited about this and we're really excited about the data that we're just starting to get. So we started doing this about a year ago with -- yeah, October, November, 2017. And we do our annual recertifications three to four months ahead of time. So yeah, we do have about a year's worth of data or maybe a little more now.

Initially we had a paper recertification packet that we'd mail out to tenants. And so we added the survey questions as an attachment. Now we've moved to online recertification. And the great thing with that is we can make the form required. So we use a program called DocuSign. We've digitized a lot of our forms. We're still working the kinks out, but it's pretty cool. So we're able to collect it there, although the staff still have to pull it down from DocuSign and enter it into the form 50058. But once they've gotten used to it, I'll show you what it involved, it doesn't add that much time to processing a recertification.

So the nuts and bolts, our HCV program manager trained all of our program representatives on the different letter codes for the data fields, which Dylan was starting to show you, and how to enter it into the form. They need a couple refreshers, because any change to an existing process will always be a little confusing or met with some resistance. But no one has complained about it in quite some time now. So that's definitely an achievement.

And one little tweak we made is each answer on the survey had a letter code, but we only put the letter codes on the version that the staff uses, just to not confuse our tenants. I know Dylan was talking about this, so the form 50058 has all these different fields. Most of them are designated for required data that HUD collects, like household members or ages, income, etc. But they're for PHA use only fields. So we just had to figure out a way to -- we're using some of of those fields for other things. But then once Dylan explained to us that we could merge it, as long as we put the ConnectHome data first, then that was great. And it's really just become routine at this point.

So here's just a little picture of what the survey looks like that our tenants see. It's the same questions that Dylan was showing you earlier. This is just the format that ours comes in. I'll leave it there for a second so you can look at it. And then we enter it into our software. This is an example, part of the screenshot of a screen where we enter the 50058 information. And so you can see my little red arrow here where the ConnectHome data actually goes. Every PHA has a different software program, but they all do basically the same thing and have a section where you enter the 50058. I know some other PHAs had to have their software vendor actually open up those fields, but we didn't have to deal with that or do anything special to our software.

And then the coolest part is what the data actually looks like. Hopefully you can read this okay. But Dylan has been sending me this on a quarterly basis. And there's two screens. This is one of them. You can see how many -- so we have three quarters worth of data so far. You can see how many connections we have, you can see when people were connected, different outcomes, whether it's education, employment, what people are using the internet for. And you can slice and dice it by whether people are connected or not connected.

And I feel like I've just started to scratch the surface of this. But it's really exciting because correlation isn't the same thing as causation. But you can at least see a link between folks that have self-reported either no internet or becoming connected recently, and different changes in education, employment, and other outcomes. So I think there's a lot that we can do with that, that we have barely even touched.

But even in the more immediate term, we are using it just to identify which of our tenants are connected and who are not. So that when we actually start to deploy devices and connections through ConnectHome, we can make sure we're targeting -- sounds silly, but you don't wanna just give away a bunch of computers to people that already have computers or are already connected necessarily. You want to focus on the folks who are not connected. And so we can actually do that by collecting this data. And we're actually preparing for our first mini deployment next month, which I mentioned on this slide.

And you can -- so after three quarters you can see -- this is all self-report, so it's not perfect, but about 40 percent of tenants are reporting being connected. I would've expected it to be a little higher than that, but then I remembered that just like me, most of the time many people just use their phone. And that's the dominant thing we find with our folks. Which is great for basic things including our online recertification. It's very mobile friendly. But not so great if you're trying to apply for a job, do homework, etc. And again, I think we just -- there's a lot of rich data and I hope we all have some time to put our heads together to really understand what it's telling us. Because ultimately this should be guiding our deployment effort. That's it for my piece. So I'll give it back to the moderator, to Brianna, and maybe we open it up for questions.

Brianna: Yes. Thank you, Charlie. We did receive one question in the chat box during the presentation from Michael Strom [ph]. This question is for Dylan. The question is, for each field can you have more than one question?

Dylan Sweeney: Sure. I could take this one. So each field contains a sort of group of questions, or three I think to five depending on the field that are all related. So each question has only a single response. And then within that field you enter the responses. So I think on slide 21 we sort of show what that looks like. So what you enter into a field is going to look something like this. So A, comma, D, comma, H. And so each one of those letters is an answer for one of three questions within one field. I hope that answers the question.

Brianna: Great. Thank you. We received another question from [inaudible] Alfordson [ph]. Sorry if I'm pronouncing that incorrectly. Her question, I believe this is to Dylan as well, will HUD be able to provide software support to add this if it has to be added?

Dylan Sweeney: So it shouldn't need to be added because the fields are required to be on the form. So those PHA used fields are already in any form. So any software you use, that's encoding the form 50058 should already include these fields. But unfortunately HUD is not going to be able to provide any software support.

Brianna: Great. Thank you. We have another question from Maribel Martinez. I believe this is also for you, Dylan. The question is, how quickly does the data get turned around? In other words, do communities get reports in intervals or on demand?

Dylan Sweeney: So communities are not going to receive automated reports yet. We're still working on how this will work when we have more people participating. Right now it's just Rhode Island, so we've had sort of a personal relationship about it. The data are sort of collated quarterly. And there's about a two month time lag. So it might be reasonable to expect that sort of one to two month after every quarter ends and that quarter is fully submitted, that there would be some visible data to examine. But again, we're not 100 percent sure on how best to display that information to you guys.

Brianna: Okay. Great. And just to make an announcement, if you have a question, feel free to use the hand in your box. Raise your hand and we'll just unmute you so you can give either Dylan or Charlie your question.

Dina Lehman-Kim: So this is Dina. While we're waiting for questions, and I hope we get many more, I do have a question for people who may after today want to use the 50058 to do reporting for ConnectHome. And I hope there are at least several. Who do they need to contact if they want to do this? They can certainly reach out to me, Dina. But Dylan, would you be willing to accept expressions of interest?

Dylan Sweeney: Sure. I would be happy I think to maybe have a follow up quick maybe conference call. And obviously you can -- I think my email is available somewhere here. But yeah, we have sort of off the shelf material that would allow you to sort of start this up whatever the next quarter is. And I'd be happy to walk you through that process.

Dina Lehman-Kim: Great. Thanks.

Brianna: Thank you. And I've also received a question from Michael Strom. And I believe this is going to Dylan as well. Earlier in the presentation Dylan showed ISP coverage by area. Where was this found?

Dylan Sweeney: I don't know that I showed ISP coverage by area. And we don't have that information. So ISPs report directly to the ConnectHome team here at HUD, the number of connections they have for specific areas. And I think we provide those data to you guys as well. We don't tell you the specific ISPs. We can tell you the total connections that all ISPs have provided in your community. As far as knowing the activities of a specific ISP in your community, I'd recommend that you reach out to them directly. I think that's unfortunately how that has to go.

Brianna: And then this next question is for Dina or Dylan. It says, are there communities who are not eligible to use HUD form 50058?

Dina Lehman-Kim: I mean, I think tribes use a different form. But I don't -- I think all public housing authorities should use the 58. Dylan, do you know of anything else?

Dylan Sweeney: I think all public housing uses the 58. But in general if there are any -- if there's any sort of area in your recertification form, like a form that serves that purpose that has a PHA use or a -- whatever the organization title use field is, you could potentially collect data in the exact same way. This is sort of format agnostic. So if you're trying to implement it with your multi-family units, I know they have a different form. You could potentially do it this way as well.

Charlie Francis: Yes. On the 50059.

Brianna: Right. That's what I was thinking. It's the 50059 for multi-family.

Charlie Francis: It's very similar.

Brianna: I'm not seeing any other questions in the chat box as of yet. Feel free to raise your hand or put in the chat question. We'll hold a few minutes for any additional questions.

Dylan Sweeney: I see where can you find information on how to incorporate the 50058. I'm not 100 percent sure. Do you just mean like how to do this? Because this is I guess the material we have on this. And I'd be happy to follow up with you specifically about how to incorporate it. But theoretically the 50058 should already be incorporated into your recertification process. So you would just -- we would -- we'll provide you with the list of questions and the formatting for entry, and you would just ask the questions as part of the regular certification process when the questions occur in the form.

Charlie Francis: Yeah. It's HUD required form, so everybody should be using it in some way. Nearly everyone will be using some kind of software. So you don't always necessarily see form 50058, but the data that you're entering goes into that form, which is submitted into HUD's data system.

Dylan Sweeney: And so as for formatting it, so and I guess I'm not sure I actually made this clear in the presentation. The power in this data for all of us, they're all formatted exactly the same. So I guess Charlie, your team sort of got advantage of first mover. You got to sort of tweak it to what meets you best. But moving forward we're going to use the standard that Charlie and I developed for the answering of these questions and the formatting. So that way we can look and compare answers between multiple PHAs. So what we would provide to you is a combination of survey questions and entry formatting. Because the answers must be entered in a certain way. So it's sort of an all in one product.

Dina Lehman-Kim: So this is Dina. While we're waiting for more questions, I did want to stress something that Dylan said, which is that this is groundbreaking research and reporting. A lot of think tanks do research into the digital divide. And of course the digital divide by definition is talking about people who are low income. And those are the people we serve. So having this kind of data directly from the PHAs is really -- it's as we said, groundbreaking. It really hasn't been done before as extensively. I mean there have been some reports, but very few, and

certainly with not the kind of access that we would have. So I really do encourage you to participate in this. And I'm sure Dylan would be excited to have more data, right Dylan?

Dylan Sweeney: More data is more better.

Brianna: Okay. We have another question. This question is, where can I find the contact information, that's a great question, for Dylan to express interest in obtaining the survey?

Charlie Francis: You could just put it in the chat box now.

Brianna: Thank you. Hopefully everyone can see that. If not, you can feel free to contact us and we'll share that information as well. The next question that we have is, if the 2Q-T fields are already being used for certain questions, could additional ConnectHome related questions be added in either before or after these existing questions?

Charlie Francis: Yes.

Dylan Sweeney: Go for it, Charlie.

Charlie Francis: Well yes. I learned this from Dylan. All you have to do is -- it worked for us at least. You just have to put the ConnectHome questions first. Because when Dylan is doing the analysis for us, it reads in that order. There may be some -- it's a little bit case by case, but that's the general concept, right Dylan?

Dylan Sweeney: Yes. So I just put up that example of the coding again. So there are a set number of questions that are entered in each field. It's important that you always adhere to the formatting. Unfortunately if there are systemic errors in data entry, we have to throw out the whole field because we can't be certain what the responses are. But each field has a limited amount of characters it can contain. But if you just put the set number, the responses first, all of the space in the field after those answers are encoded, you can put in, you can use. It doesn't matter to us. We just sort of capture that amount of characters.

Brianna: Okay. We have a question from Ms. Latoya Nixt [ph]. She is actually -- I can't see the question, so I'm taking you off mute, if you don't mind reading your question off to us.

Latoya Nixt: Good afternoon. My question was, is it possible for you to email the PowerPoint?

Dylan Sweeney: Sure. Is that something that we can do on your moderator side potentially?

Brianna: Yes. Definitely. We can send out the PowerPoint to everyone that was registered for the webinar today.

Latoya Nixt: Okay. Thank you.

Brianna: You're welcome. Any other questions? I don't see anything in the chat box or any other hands raised.

Dina Lehman-Kim: Don't be shy everybody. This is your chance to ask the experts.

Dylan Sweeney: So as long as everyone's still online. If you are going to follow up and email me related to this topic, please include 50058 somewhere in your subject line. It just makes it a lot easier for me to manage stuff.

Brianna: Okay. Great. And we just received another question. It says, in the follow up email, could you list the source code to input all of these questions and the unformatted questions?

Dylan Sweeney: Sure. Charlie, if you could send me the up to date survey that you're using, and I can just double-check and make sure it's the same as the one that I'm working on. We can provide that, I guess, as well along with the PowerPoint essentially.

Charlie Francis: Yeah. Sure.

Brianna: Okay. I think we may have another question from Ms. Nixt. I'm going to unmute her, if that's the hand was raised. One moment. Okay, you're unmuted, Ms. Nixt. Did you have a second question?

Latoya Nixt: No, ma'am.

Brianna: Okay. Sorry about that.

Latoya Nixt: That's okay.

Brianna: I'm not sure whose hand that was. I'm not seeing it's raised. They might have put it down. Okay. We have another question. [inaudible] residents been open to answering these questions?

Charlie Francis: So they -- we just make them. We haven't gotten any pushback though. When we were doing a paper based process, there'd be a few that might be blank. But now that we've gone electronic, it's required. So I'm actually surprised because any housing authority will get pushback on all sorts of things from residents. But we haven't gotten any that I have heard about.

Dylan Sweeney: And on our side I'll just say that the form is designed to accommodate refusals. So potentially there might be some questions that people would want to refuse and other questions that they would not. So that's fine, as long as it's entered in the correct formatting.

Brianna: We have a follow up question to the last question that says, what about your property managers?

Charlie Francis: Not sure I understand the question. Like are we getting pushback from property managers?

Brianna: Yes. I believe that's what they're asking.

Charlie Francis: Well so for us, we don't have a public housing program. We just have a voucher program. So it's mostly small landlords, except for our project based vouchers. Well the thing is, these recerts don't go through the property managers in the first place. So in most cases they don't know about it anyway.

Brianna: So sorry, she followed up with her question saying, have they been open to adding the work?

Charlie Francis: Oh. My staff grumbled about it a little bit at first. But once they realized it wasn't really that much additional work, it's been fine. You'll always get a little bit of that when you're introducing something.

Brianna: Okay. And the next question we have is, are there any legal concerns that should be considered for any of these questions on a state by state basis?

Charlie Francis: Legal concerns? I don't think so. But anything new like this that we're adding to our documents, we'll always run it through our legal counsel. And I'd suggest that to anybody.

Brianna: The next question we have, are there [inaudible] participants completing the online forms on their telephone?

Charlie Francis: Yes. The majority are. Because our site is mobile friendly.

Brianna: That's the last question we have right now. I'm not seeing any other questions yet in the chat box or any hands.

Dylan Sweeney: I'm not aware of any. Obviously I would just make sure to go to state this disclaimer to make sure that everyone's aware that the information collected is private and won't be used to qualify or disqualify anyone from any benefits or programs at all. And that's just something that we thought would be good to include. It's not something that we have any reason to believe is legally necessary. I just think it's polite.

Brianna: Okay. We have another question that states, Charles, have you found any surprising data through this method?

Charlie Francis: Well only about 40 percent of our tenants are reporting having at home broadband other than a phone. And that is lower than I would have expected actually. I think it'll be more interesting once we start cross-referencing it with demographic data, to get an understanding like are there certain demographics that are more likely to be unconnected than others, or certain areas of the state. I think we need to dive into it more to really understand the implications.

Brianna: Okay. Thank you. Dina, is there anything you would like to add to this discussion before we start wrapping things up?

Dina Lehman-Kim: No. I think I've asked my questions. And I'm very grateful for everybody's participation and the wonderful questions we have received. I guess the only thing I would say is to really think about using this form for your data collection purposes for ConnectHome USA.

And if you have any questions, you can feel free to reach out to me; you can send a note to connecthome@hud.gov. And we'll be certainly following up with everyone with these presentation materials and the additional information that Dylan mentioned about the coding and everything like that.

Brianna: All right. Well if there aren't any more questions, we will consider this webinar to be over. Thank you so much everyone for your participation. Thank you to our presenters. I hope this has been informative.

Dina Lehman-Kim: Thank you.

Charlie Francis: Thanks, everybody.

Dylan Sweeney: Thank you.

(END)