

The Perceived Nutrition Environment (NEMS-P) Guidelines for Use and FAQs

The Perceived Nutrition Environment (NEMS-P) tool is a survey that records the interpretations of the community nutrition environment, consumer nutrition environment, home food environment, food shopping behaviors, eating behaviors, and background characteristics of the person who does most of the food shopping for the household. It was developed as a tool to compliment the observational data collected using the other NEMS tools. It was developed for use in an urban environment and may need to be customized for non-urban areas.

How is NEMS-P different from the other NEMS tools (NEMS-R, NEMS-S, NEMS-CS)? The NEMS-P tool is a survey to be answered or completed by the person who does the majority of the food shopping in a household to learn about his/her perceptions of the nutrition environments (where food is consumed or purchased and in the home). The other NEMS tools are recording a trained rater's direct observations of the nutrition environments of specific food outlets in a defined area.

Why might I decide to do the NEMS-P in my area? The NEMS-P will give you different information to supplement other NEMS data. If you are planning to do an intervention or project, the information you learn on how community members are perceiving the nutrition environment, may help you to better tailor the intervention or project. For example, say that the NEMS –S data you collected for a neighborhood revealed that the stores do sell the majority of fruits and vegetables listed in NEMS-S, but the data from NEMS-P highlighted that about 40% of the respondents from that neighborhood said that it was either somewhat hard or very hard to get fresh fruits and vegetables at the store where they buy most of their food. The perception of the availability does not necessarily agree with the reality of the situation so you may decide to do something different than if the NEMS-S data had shown that most stores sell a very limited selection of fruits and vegetables. The intervention that had been planned might change depending on what is revealed related to perception.

I haven't collected any NEMS data yet. Does it matter which NEMS tool is used first? As far as we know, it shouldn't matter which NEMS tool you use first. Depending on your resources, you can do them all at the same time or slowly do one at a time. The only possibilities that might be cause for concern would be if you had already collected NEMS-S and NEMS-R data a long time ago and there had been a lot of development since, that might have changed the food landscape.

How can I use the NEMS-P data with the other NEMS data I have collected? As with any data analysis, it partly depends on your specific reasons for collecting the data (goals of the project or research study). You will need to develop a specific data analysis plan that details how you will link the data. Make sure to review all of the NEMS-P related publications to see how others have used the NEMS data in their projects.

Can the NEMS-P survey be conducted as an in-person or phone survey? You will need to decide based on your project personnel, resources, timeline and intended audience, which format makes the most sense for gathering the data. The NEMS-P could be done online using a tablet or small handheld computer by the person if there are no language, literacy or technology barriers. Or, a paper version can be completed as well. If there may be language or literacy barriers, your staff may want to conduct the interview face to face or over the phone. In the actual NEMS-P study, participants were mailed a paper version to complete by themselves.

Can I customize the NEMS-P? As with all of the NEMS tool, you may decide to customize NEMS-P based on your project's goals and objectives, your data analysis plan, and your resources. After completing the original study and doing data analysis, we recommend incorporating a few more location markers into the survey. (The location data generated may help to analyze the data in more geo-spatial ways.) Potential questions might include asking for the closest cross streets of home residence, the name of their neighborhood if it is commonly known, the name of the grocery store that relates to the survey questions on where they shop for most of their food and the name of the restaurant that they most frequent or the street on which the establishments are located. We recommend that you work with the person who will be doing the data analysis to make sure that the added questions will give you the correct format of information to be incorporated into a GIS analysis.

Also, since the NEMS-P was developed for an urban area, some may need to customize some of the questions to a more rural landscape where walking to food outlets may not be an option as well as the definition of neighborhood and other details may need to be altered to better match the project's landscape. If you do customize, please send us your customization to share with others!

Can I shorten NEMS-P? Depending on the goals and objectives of your project, you may decide to use the NEMS-P core questions. You can look at both NEMS-P and the NEMS-P core to decide which best meets your needs or what background information you would like to know about the respondents. The sections E and F of NEMS-P cover general household questions and background questions.

Where can I learn more about NEMS-P? You can go to the publications webpage on the NEMS website and read the published journal article on NEMS –P. Also, you can look at the NEMS-P tool.