



19 November 2022

New civic conversation toolkit for youths to discuss race and religion issues

National Youth Council will develop more resources to spark respectful conversations around local-foreign and intergenerational issues.

Over 60 percent of 800 youths engaged in a digital poll this month agreed that efforts to bridge differences in race and religious issues will be key in strengthening our social harmony. About 40 percent also believed that more opportunities to share experiences and broaden perspectives, and greater openness in discussing differences, will help strengthen bonds with one another. These insights on race and religion are from National Youth Council's (NYC's) digital engagement campaign to gather youth views on what keeps Singapore united¹ as part of the Forward Singapore exercise.

2 These findings were shared by Senior Minister of State (SMS) for Communications and Information, and Health, Janil Puthuchery, at the launch of NYC's first set of conversations cards, *Beneath The Surface*. Refer to ANNEX A for SMS Janil's speech. Youths can use these cards to discuss difficult topics such as casual racism and workplace discrimination. SMS Janil, together with 60 youths from Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA), MENDAKI, Chinese Development Assistance Council, and the Eurasian Association, candidly shared their views on scenarios depicted in the cards. *One of the eight scenarios found in the toolkit has been extracted for ANNEX B.*

3 Developed in partnership with Bold at Work and The Whitehatters, the Forward SG Civic Conversations toolkit is an initiative proposed by youth leaders – Nazhath Faheema and Ahmad Firdaus Daud – who saw the need for more resources to facilitate respectful dialogues around sensitive issues. Conversation cards facilitating discussions on local-foreign interactions and intergenerational differences will also be developed subsequently. These issues were chosen by over 25% of youths as issues which can affect social cohesion.²

4 “Through our surveys we know that youths think Singapore is heading in the right direction to being racially inclusive, yet many feel more work is needed. Social media may have allowed youths to “call out” perceived racist behaviours, but to build a future together we need to emphasise our common values and find common ground. This is what the toolkit is for and we hope it will empower youths to listen, learn about one another and create safe spaces for one another.” said Chief Executive of the National Youth Council David Chua.

¹ [Youthactionplan.sg/forwardsg-staying-united/](https://youthactionplan.sg/forwardsg-staying-united/)

² NYC Youth Sentiment Polls (2022)

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5 The civic conversations toolkit will be distributed through self-help groups such as SINDA and MENDAKI, and student networks in IHLs, such as the polytechnics and Institute of Technical Education (ITE). Interested organisations can also sign up at [go.gov.sg/nyctoolkit \(form\)](https://go.gov.sg/nyctoolkit(form)) for facilitation and toolkit workshops. The NYC will be launching a digital engagement campaign in December 2022 on mindsets and practices youths can acquire to engage in their own difficult conversations.

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About the National Youth Council

At NYC, we believe in a world where young people are respected and heard and have the ability to influence and make a difference in the world. Together with our partners, we develop future-ready youth who are committed to Singapore by instilling in them a heart for service, resilience, and an enterprising spirit.

**SPEECH BY SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE JANIL PUTHUCHEARY
LAUNCH OF CIVIC CONVERSATIONS TOOLKIT ON RACE &
RELIGION SATURDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2022, 10.15 AM – 11.05 AM**

DRAFT SPEECH TRANSCRIPT – TO CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Friends,

1. Good morning. It is exciting to see all of you so keenly engaged in using the toolkit to facilitate conversations among yourselves.
2. I enjoyed listening to the sharing by the various groups, which reflects the depth of the discussions you have had.

Civil Dialogue is Necessary to Social Cohesion

3. The conversations and discussions that you are having today are essential to strengthen our social cohesion. Only when we make it a point to communicate openly and respectfully, can we truly understand and value each other's stories and perspectives.
 - a. This communication is especially important today because we have increasingly diverse views and experiences. We must appreciate our diversity while keeping our relationships and bonds with each other strong.
4. The Civic Conversations Toolkit on Race & Religion that we are launching today will equip us to better participate in, and more importantly, lead conversations on sensitive topics. Engaging one another on such issues may be difficult and uncomfortable for some of us, but it will be through these constructive dialogues that we will move forward together.
 - a. As you have already experienced, the toolkit guides you on how to enter a conversation with care and empathy and provides suggestions for what questions you can ask to deepen your understanding about another's culture and background.
 - b. It also provides a range of scenarios, some of which may have struck a familiar chord for us and resonated with our personal experiences.

Youths Play an Important Role in Strengthening Unity

5. It is fitting that ideas for this toolkit originated in conversations that youths had last August.

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- a. Nazhath Faheema, who is the founder of hash.peace³, and several youth leaders raised the idea of having a toolkit to educate youths on engaging about race and religion issues.
 - b. The National Youth Council (NYC) continued this conversation and partnered the White Hatters and Bold@Work to design the toolkit and tested it with a wider pool of youths.
6. Our youths, like all of you here today, are passionate about having these conversations and are equipping themselves with the necessary skills.
7. NYC is committed to turning conversations and ideas into action and will continue to provide opportunities and resources for youth to have these conversations.
- a. Along with this toolkit, NYC will be holding facilitation workshops and providing resources for organisations and individuals, like educators or students, who want to use this toolkit to spark the same kinds of conversations we are having today.
 - b. The Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and NYC also run the Youth Action Challenge (YAC) annually, and the YAC Season 4 is currently ongoing. One of its four themes this year is “Inclusivity”, under which youths will be developing projects to
 - i. Build meaningful relationships across races and religions in workplaces, and
 - ii. Foster greater respect and understanding for diversity on online platforms.

Achieving Unity Is a Collective Effort

8. I hope that the lesson that we can all take away from today is that strengthening unity in our renewed social compact cannot rely on laws and policies alone. We can criminalise racist behaviour, but we cannot legislate empathy, mutual respect, and trust.
9. It is our individual and community efforts that will uphold strong and close bonds with each other, create a sense of belonging in us, and build a more united people.
10. The Forward Singapore exercise is an exercise for us to reflect on and renew our social compact. It is an opportunity for us to discuss and agree on the roles and responsibilities of different segments of society – the Government, community, businesses, and individuals.
11. I encourage you to contribute your voice to this effort, whether through dialogues such as the panel discussion in the next segment, or through conversations with family, friends, or colleagues.
12. Continue to build strong relationships with each other and strengthen our unity as one people – one conversation at a time.

Thank you.

³ hash.peace is a youth-led advocacy group committed to catalysing conversations and developing programmes that contribute towards sustainable social harmony.

Marry Go Round is one of the eight scenarios that some of us may have encountered.

In the group of up to six youths from different ethnic groups and backgrounds, a facilitator will prompt the participants to share their honest views about the scenario and even pose questions to participants. The scenario helps to initiate discussion and reflection on the different perspectives raised.

Marry Go Round (1/2)

Known as the friendly neighbourhood uncle, Mr Chua would always sit at his favourite spot at the coffee shop and greet residents with a smile.

Today, however, he was in an unusually horrible mood. His son has recently introduced his girlfriend Kavitha, who is Indian, to his family, and Mr Chua was not pleased.

Marry Go Round (2/2)

“She wouldn't be able to speak to us in Mandarin!” he grumbled to his friend. “I want my grandchildren to have fair skin!”

A customer near him overheard and could not resist interjecting. “I think it's racist to say that.” Mr Chua was taken aback.

He did not understand how wanting a Chinese daughter-in-law could be seen as an act of racism. To him, it was just a matter of preference.

Marry Go Round 

What are some comments on interracial/inter-faith marriage you have heard?

Share something that you connected with, either based on what you just heard or with any of the characters in the case study.

What else do you wish could be done in such a situation?
I wish _____ or I hope _____