



MEDIA RELEASE

REACH PRE-BUDGET 2019 FEEDBACK EXERCISE

Background

The annual Pre-Budget 2019 Feedback Exercise by REACH and the Ministry of Finance (MOF) was conducted between December 3, 2018 and January 11, 2019. The objective is to seek public feedback and suggestions on the upcoming Budget through multiple REACH online and face-to-face channels.¹ A total of more than 2,500 responses, mostly from face-to-face engagement sessions, were collated from across Singapore. Respondents reacted to several broad themes including:

(a) Ageing and Healthcare

- (i) The theme “Ageing and Healthcare” emerged as one of the most-discussed topics that came up during the dialogue. Citing the demands that come with an ageing population and growing healthcare needs, respondents highlighted the need to build a healthcare system that is accessible, affordable and provides quality care for all.
- (ii) To help seniors receive more affordable care in the community, respondents called for better coordination and sharing of resources/data between the Government, healthcare providers and the social services sectors. Many respondents also called for a reassessment of how subsidies are allocated to better channel funds to those who needed them the most.
- (iii) Respondents praised the National Steps Challenge as an excellent platform in promoting a healthy lifestyle for all Singaporeans and would like to see initiatives of similar nature in future.

(b) Support for Families

- (i) On creating a more conducive environment for Singaporeans to start families, respondents asked for greater support in terms of access to housing, ensuring quality early childhood education and strengthening the practice of work-life balance in the work place.

¹ These included six Listening Points island-wide, one dialogue, two radio talk shows, as well as the Budget 2019 microsite (www.reach.gov.sg/budget2019), REACH email, Facebook page and toll-free hotline.

- (ii) Respondents also suggested providing subsidized childcare and after-school services, school supplies and more community outreach programmes to better assist children from low-income or vulnerable families. They added that tapping on the wider community network such as collaborating with local grassroots organisations (GROs) would allow these children to receive more comprehensive support.

(c) Innovation

- (i) Respondents generally acknowledged the need for Singapore to achieve greater productivity, innovation and internationalisation so as to maintain a competitive edge amid the changing global and domestic landscape.
- (ii) On how Singapore companies and workers can become more innovative, respondents felt that companies need to foster the spirit of innovation in their organization. This can be done through developing R&D capabilities, encouraging employees to undergo training and contribute new ideas.
- (iii) Respondents also called for more collaboration between the Government, public and private sectors to encourage innovation, lifelong learning and the adoption of new technological tools and knowledge.

(d) Security and External Relations

- (i) Numerous respondents noted that everyone should know they have a part to play in the fight against terrorism and in strengthening our community resilience. They recognised the importance of staying vigilant during peacetime and staying united in times of crisis. Many also stated that we should encourage volunteerism and build a stronger community spirit.
- (ii) Respondents offered suggestions on how to foster stronger community bonds in Singapore. Apart from existing initiatives such as the SAF Volunteer Corps, SGSecure and SCDF's Community First Responder, respondents suggested that the Government look into partnering with the grassroots organisations, unions, inter-religious organisations and non-governmental organisations. Others added that the Government could also partner with the private companies to instil in their employees the concept of Total Defence, as well as the schools to engage the youths through talks and workshops to encourage volunteerism.

(e) Philanthropy and Volunteerism

- (i) Respondents felt that it would generally require a mind-set shift to build a more caring and inclusive society in Singapore. One suggestion was to inculcate the spirit of volunteerism and the culture of giving in schools as part of the education curriculum (e.g. volunteering to be made compulsory for all tertiary students). Others said that there should be

incentives for working adults to volunteer, either in the form of tax rebates, day-off from work or claims for transportation and meals. Some added that companies could incorporate volunteerism as part of their KPIs and appraisals.

- (ii) Several respondents also asked for a higher representation of NGOs and VWOs' voices in Parliament to provide more opportunities for the Government to better understand the needs of those who need help and to improve existing Government policies and schemes.
- (iii) In light of past incidents of donations being misused, some respondents called for greater transparency and the provision of more timely and accurate information to donors on how their donations were utilised by the charitable organisations.

(f) Other Feedback and Suggestions

- (i) Apart from the key feedback themes, respondents said they hope to see more financial support for the middle income families / sandwiched class, lower healthcare and education costs, more subsidies and financial support to help the needy, as well as lower taxes and greater personal income tax reliefs.
- (ii) Other feedback included engaging and listening to the voices of the people more, keep the cost of living low, prudent use of our budget and greater transparency on Government spending as well as keeping the GST as it is.
- (iii) Some also opined that the Government should prioritise expenditure on ageing and healthcare as well as supporting the less fortunate and vulnerable groups. Several others acknowledged the importance of our defence budget in enhancing Singapore's security and protecting our sovereignty.

REACH Chairman's message

"The Budget is about national priorities and every Singaporean has a stake in it. The Pre-Budget feedback exercise provides a good opportunity for every Singaporean youth, working professional and family, regardless of their circumstance or background, to let the Government know how we may better the lives for everyone through a balanced, fair and well-considered Budget."

**Issued by REACH
30 Jan 2019**

About REACH

REACH (reaching everyone for active citizenry @ home) was launched in October 2006 when the Feedback Unit was restructured to move beyond gathering public feedback, to become the lead agency for engaging and connecting with citizens. This signifies its renewed commitment to encourage and promote an active citizenry through citizen participation and involvement. The three key roles of REACH are to: Gather and Gauge Ground Sentiments; Reach Out and Engage Citizens; and Promote Active Citizenry through Citizen Participation and Involvement.