PROJECT REPORT

Building Bridges Across Differences:

Piloting a Consensus Conference on Local-Foreign Integration in Singapore

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ONE HOME FOR ALL Changi Simei

#OneChangiSimei

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“Singapore is, and has always been, an immigrant nation. Becoming Singaporean is not a matter of ancestry, but a matter of choice and conviction, and contribution to our shared future.”

— Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, Facebook, 31 August 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> *"The shape of a man's nose, the cut of his eyes, the colour or the texture of his hair, are not a sound basis on which to build a political or an economic philosophy. Neither can political and economic problems be solved by reference to something which we just got through the accident of birth — our skin, our colour, and the shape of our eyes."*
>
> — S. Rajaratnam, Legislative Assembly, 21 July 1959

S. Rajaratnam's words shaped Singapore's approach to race and religion. This study asked whether the same ethos could guide local-foreign relations. Can residents[1] of different residency statuses reason together on contested issues and find common ground? Putnam's (2007) influential research documented that diversity could erode social capital in the short to medium run, with residents "hunkering down" rather than building bridges. Is this response inevitable in Singapore?

Approach

IPS and REACH[2] designed a Consensus Conference to test these questions. A Consensus Conference is a structured deliberative process where a diverse group of residents discuss contested issues, exchange perspectives, and work toward common positions through facilitated dialogue. The method originated in Denmark and has since been adapted across jurisdictions to address complex policy questions where public input and legitimacy matter.

[1] "Residents" in this report refers to Singapore Citizens, Permanent Residents and Foreigners living in Singapore.
[2] REACH (Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry @ Home) is the Singapore Government feedback and engagement unit under the Ministry of Digital Development and Information.

Twenty-four residents of different residency statuses from Changi Simei and East Coast group representation constituencies participated in four sessions of structured deliberation on local-foreign integration. The experiment tested whether the process could surface underlying tensions, build relationships across residency lines, and catalyse collaborative action beyond the sessions themselves.

Findings

By the end of the Consensus Conference, participants generated 67 statements and achieved unanimous consensus (100%) on 23 of them. The overall consensus rate of 34.3% masks important variation across domains. Community life achieved the highest rate at 77.8% (14 of 18 statements). Education achieved 25.0% (4 of 16 statements) and jobs achieved 22.2% (4 of 18 statements). Multiculturalism achieved only 6.7% (1 of 15 statements). These patterns reveal where common ground is achievable and where disagreement persists. Distributive policy questions proved more tractable than questions of national identity.

Community Life

Participants reached broad consensus on norms of mutual respect and reciprocal effort in everyday interactions. Yet the consensus rested on a foundation that participants themselves recognised as fragile. They described neighbourhood interactions as "hi-bye" relationships that were polite but shallow. The prevailing norm was tolerance without trust, coexistence without community. Participants accepted this equilibrium but acknowledged its limits. It functions adequately under benign conditions. Under stress, particularly in online spaces, its latent tensions may surface.

Jobs and Education

Jobs and education drew the strongest emotions because the stakes were higher and the issues felt zero-sum. More for foreigners was seen to come at the expense of Singaporeans, and vice versa. Despite this framing, participants reached consensus once they could specify conditions of acceptability. On access to schools and jobs, participants endorsed citizen priority provided that all things are equal. This formulation balanced meritocratic ideals with a conditional preference for locals.

One of the most striking findings was foreign participants endorsing citizen priority. A non-resident participant stated the position directly:

> *"Singaporeans should get preferential treatment, because they are the core of this country. They pay the most taxes, they are the most invested, and to treat them exactly the same as foreigners that could come from anywhere else, it's just not fair." (Non-resident, Female, 37, Caucasian)*

This endorsement was grounded in recognition that citizens bear obligations that foreigners do not, including taxes and National Service, and therefore have priority claim to opportunities in their own country. The polarisation between locals and foreigners may be narrower than online discourse suggests. The Consensus Conference created conditions where this middle ground could emerge and be documented.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism produced the lowest consensus because it touched on questions of national identity rather than distributive fairness. These were disagreements that could not be resolved by spelling out conditions of acceptability.

The key tension lay between cultural openness and identity preservation. One group wanted Singapore to remain open to new cultures and to allow the Singapore identity to evolve over time. Another group prioritised protecting an identity they saw as hard-won and slow to build. They argued that the social compact had shifted without any conscious collective choice being made. These were disagreements about who counts as "we" and how Singapore's culture should change. Both local and foreign participants explained their positions with clarity. Neither side could overcome the impasse through conditional compromise. The domain revealed the limits of deliberation when identity rather than interest is at stake.

Effects of Deliberation on Participants

Pre- and post-survey evidence documented meaningful shifts in participant attitudes and dispositions.

Greater Perspective-Taking and Intellectual Humility

Participants became more ready to take other perspectives, acquired intellectual humility, and grew more able to see the legitimacy of opposing views. Singapore citizens showed the highest cumulative gains on comfort engaging with people whose backgrounds or perspectives differed from their own. Non-resident participants recorded the largest reductions in certainty that their views on local-foreign integration

were correct, signalling recalibration after encountering new information and perspectives during the sessions.

Open Discourse Without Social Desirability Bias

These shifts were unlikely to reflect social desirability bias. Participants reported that they could question stereotypes and challenge each other's positions. They felt that their emotions and personal stories were valued as legitimate contributions to the deliberative process.

Increased Civic Efficacy and Perceived Government Responsiveness

Following the Consensus Conference, participants expressed stronger beliefs that they have a say in what government does, that government seriously considers input from public engagement, and that government cares what residents think. They reported greater confidence in the value of their contributions, described the process as empowering, and indicated willingness to participate in future engagement opportunities. Many also expressed interest in community-based integration activities. The deliberative experience reinforced participants' sense that public participation is meaningful and that their voices matter in policy processes.

Positive Evaluations and Protection of Minority Views

Overall evaluations were positive. 95.8% of participants reported a positive experience, 91.6% described it as meaningful, and 87.5% felt the process was empowering. 83.3% believed the model could be replicated across other constituencies, communities, or topics. All participants (100%) agreed that facilitators recorded views respectfully even when disagreement occurred. Statements that failed

to reach unanimous (100%) support were labelled as "no-go zones" rather than softened into vague compromise statements. This approach protected minority views from being masked by majoritarian language and ensured that recorded consensus were reflected genuinely.

From Deliberation to Collaborative Action

The deliberation also translated into collaborative action. A voluntary working group of seven Singapore citizens and three foreigners formed to develop Triad Trails, a ground-up community integration initiative. The group submitted a proposal to the People's Association, formed a WhatsApp coordination group, and continued meeting in subsequent months. Participants also co-authored a 48-page Residents' Report documenting their consensus statements, no-go zones, and reflections on the process, with more than 80 revisions negotiated across residency lines. This collaborative output addresses the critique that deliberative processes produce only momentary convergence that dissipates when participants disperse.

Recommendations

Three recommendations follow from this study.

First, dedicate institutional attention to local-foreign integration as a distinct pillar of Singapore's multiculturalism.

Singapore has invested substantially in infrastructure to foster cohesion among its founding communities (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others). The Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles, OnePeople.sg, and related institutions represent decades of patient work on race and religion. The local-foreign dimension warrants

similar attention. This could take the form of expanding the mandate of existing bodies or establishing new civic infrastructure to address the identity and belonging questions raised in the multiculturalism domain that policy adjustment alone cannot resolve.

Second, strengthen public communications with attention to recognition, framing, and data discoverability.

The study surfaced participants' concerns about government communications, with three recurring patterns emerging

First, narratives of omission left citizens feeling that their contributions were not sufficiently acknowledged when it comes to local-foreign issues. Messaging that foregrounds foreign talent contributions could be balanced with explicit acknowledgment of what citizens contribute through taxes, National Service, and commitment to the nation's future.

Second, framings of dependency positioned citizens as recipients of government generosity rather than stakeholders. Policy language such as "tuition grant" could be reviewed for alternatives that position citizens as stakeholders.

Third, limited data discoverability created space for speculation. Data relevant to local-foreign questions could be made more discoverable on official channels to provide common factual ground.

These findings surface gaps in public communications that are preventable. How citizens are recognised, how programmes are framed, and what data is easily

discoverable all shape perception independently of policy substance. Attending to these dimensions could address concerns that policy adjustment alone cannot.

Third, expand the consensus conference pilot to other constituencies and other contested issues to build the evidence base for deliberative approaches.

The pilot demonstrated that structured deliberation can build bridging social capital across residency statuses, surface common ground on contested issues and generate collaborative action. Expansion to other constituencies would test whether these patterns can be replicated in areas with different demographic compositions or community histories. Extension to other contested issues where identity and recognition are at stake, such as LGBTQ+ inclusion, intergenerational equity, or religious accommodation, would clarify the boundary conditions for deliberative consensus and identify contexts where the approach adds most value. Such expansion would require investment in facilitator training, process documentation, and evaluation frameworks. The People's Association, REACH, and community partners could collaborate on adapted versions of the model, with IPS providing research support.

Conclusion

The governance direction is encouraging. The Singapore Government Partnerships Office, launched in January 2024, formalises structures for citizen-government partnership. REACH, marking its 40th anniversary in 2025, has expanded toward people-to-people dialogue alongside government-to-people engagement. Prime Minister Lawrence Wong's call for common and safe spaces where Singaporeans of

different backgrounds can meet, talk, and build common understanding aligns with what this study tested.

Rajaratnam's "democracy of deeds" framed democracy as practical participation. "The more participation there is by the people in the thousand and one activities of society, the greater the measure of democracy" (as cited in Ng, 2024, p. 386). The Consensus Conference suggests this approach can extend across citizen and foreign-resident lines. Participants found workable common ground on contested questions, built relationships that persisted beyond the formal sessions, and initiated collaborative action without prompting.

With the governance direction encouraging and proof of concept established, the remaining question is one of scale, reach, and regularity. The infrastructure for local-foreign engagement exists in nascent form. The task ahead is to strengthen it, in service of a "we first" society.

1. Introduction

Singapore's social capital is under strain. Evidence from the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) reveals a troubling erosion of the connections that bind residents to one another across differences. The 2017 IPS Social Capital Study found that more than half of approximately 3,000 residents surveyed had no close friends outside their own socioeconomic class, while residents living in public housing reported, on average, fewer than one close friend who lived in private housing estates. By 2024, the erosion had deepened: the average number of close friends among Singaporeans had declined from 10.67 in 2018 to 6.49 in 2024, with growing preferences for interaction within socioeconomic strata (Mathew et al., 2025). As IPS Director Janadas Devan cautioned at Singapore Perspectives 2025, "Social capital is not something you can bank for good and draw upon freely without also working tirelessly to replenish the account" (Devan, 2025).

This decline in social capital unfolds against a backdrop of profound demographic transformation. Official statistics reveal that non-residents comprised merely 2.9% of Singapore's total population in 1970; by June 2025, this proportion had grown to approximately 31%, with non-residents numbering 1.91 million out of a total population of 6.11 million (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2025; Yeoh, 2007). This demographic shift, representing roughly a 10-fold increase in the proportion of non-citizens, has introduced new lines of potential division even as it has contributed to Singapore's economic dynamism.

The question motivating this study is whether these trends are reversible. Can residents of diverse citizenship and residency statuses build the cross-cutting

relationships that constitute *bridging social capital*? Can structured dialogue across the local-foreign divide generate the mutual understanding, trust and collaborative capacity that diverse societies require to function well? This report presents findings from a pilot Consensus Conference designed to test precisely these possibilities.

1.1 Social Capital: The Theoretical Framework

Robert Putnam's seminal work *Bowling Alone* (2000) documented the decline of social capital in the United States and established the conceptual framework that informs this study. Putnam defined social capital as the "connections among individuals — social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p. 19). His central insight was that social capital operates through two distinct mechanisms. *Bonding capital* strengthens ties within homogeneous groups, functioning as "sociological superglue" that reinforces exclusive identities and provides essential support within communities of similarity. *Bridging capital*, by contrast, creates connections across social divisions, functioning as "sociological WD-40"[3] that enables cooperation among people who are not alike. Putnam argued that while bonding capital helps communities "get by", bridging capital is crucial for "getting ahead", and for the functioning of diverse democratic societies.

Subsequent scholarship by Szreter and Woolcock (2004) introduced a third dimension: *linking capital*, describing vertical connections between citizens and institutions, and between communities and state, that enable communities to access resources and influence across gradients of power and authority. Where bonding and

[3] Putnam's "sociological WD-40" refers to bridging social capital, which eases interaction across social divides. WD-40 is a common household lubricant used to loosen stuck parts and quiet squeaky hinges. The metaphor captures how bridging ties help diverse residents cooperate and handle disagreement more smoothly.

bridging capital describe horizontal relationships among peers, linking capital captures the vertical relationships across hierarchies. Szreter and Woolcock argued that all three forms are essential for community well-being: bonding capital for necessary social support, bridging capital for solidarity and respect across the social spectrum, and linking capital for the effective mobilisation of political resources and institutional responsiveness.

This Putnamian conceptualisation of social capital as a collective resource generating public goods stands in deliberate contrast to Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) earlier formulation, which emphasised social capital as an instrument of individual advantage. For Bourdieu, social capital represented networks mobilised for private gain and social reproduction; it served primarily to entrench existing inequalities. The tradition informing this consensus conference study takes a different view: that social capital, particularly bridging capital, represents a resource that benefits entire communities through enhanced civic participation, improved institutional performance and strengthened capacity for collective action (Putnam, 1993). This study locates itself firmly within this tradition, viewing structured deliberation as an intervention capable of generating bridging capital across the local-foreign divide.

1.2 Why Bridging Capital Matters for Singapore

Singapore's circumstances make the cultivation of bridging capital especially urgent. It faces a fertility challenge: the resident total fertility rate reached a historic low of 0.97 in 2023 and 2024, well below the replacement rate of 2.1 (National Population and Talent Division et al., 2025). This demographic trajectory, if unaddressed, portends significant challenges: an ageing population, a shrinking tax base and constrained

economic dynamism. Japan's experience offers a cautionary tale of the consequences of population decline in the absence of immigration (Coulmas, 2007).

Yet, immigration — while economically necessary — carries its own challenges if pursued without adequate attention to social integration. As Prime Minister Lawrence Wong shared recently, Singapore is fundamentally an immigrant nation, one whose survival and prosperity depend upon remaining open to global talent and maintaining connections with the international economy (Wong, 2024, 2025). The question is not whether Singapore will continue to welcome newcomers, but whether it can do so while maintaining the social cohesion that has enabled its remarkable developmental trajectory.

Global experience suggests this is no easy task. The rise of nativist populism in Western democracies — exemplified by Brexit, the electoral success of far-right parties across Europe and the exclusionary immigration rhetoric in the United States — demonstrates how readily the tensions accompanying demographic diversification can be exploited for political gain (Mudde, 2007; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Putnam's own research on diversity and social capital (2007) found that, in the short run, ethnic heterogeneity tends to reduce social solidarity; residents of diverse communities tend to "hunker down", trusting neighbours less and participating less in civic life. Yet, Putnam was careful to note that this was a short-run finding; over time, diverse societies can and do develop new forms of social solidarity that transcend initial differences.

The implication is that bridging capital does not emerge automatically from mere proximity. Residents of different backgrounds can live side-by-side in what participants in this study described as a “hi-bye” coexistence: peaceful tolerance without thick trust; shallow pleasantries without deep connection. The question is whether deliberate interventions can accelerate the development of bridging capital, moving residents from mere tolerance to genuine understanding and from distinct lives to collaborative engagement.

1.3 Deliberative Democracy: A Vehicle for Building Bridges

If the challenge is to cultivate bridging capital in an increasingly diverse society, what institutional forms might facilitate this? The theory and practice of deliberative democracy offer one compelling response. Originating in the works of Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1996), deliberative democratic theory posits that legitimate political decisions emerge from processes of reasoned public deliberation among free and equal citizens. Habermas’s concept of the *ideal speech situation*, a communicative context free from coercion, manipulation and domination, provides a normative benchmark against which actual deliberative practices can be assessed.

Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson’s influential *Democracy and Disagreement* (1996) translated these philosophical foundations into practical principles for democratic governance. They articulated three procedural conditions for legitimate deliberation: *reciprocity* (i.e., the requirement that participants offer reasons that others can reasonably accept); *publicity* (i.e., the requirement that deliberation occur transparently); and *accountability* (i.e., the requirement that participants be answerable to those affected by their decisions). Crucially, Gutmann and Thompson

acknowledged that deliberation would not resolve all disagreements, rather, its purpose was to enable citizens to live with the disagreements that remained after genuine exchange.

A central claim of deliberative democratic theory is that genuine deliberation can transform participants' preferences, moving them beyond the aggregation of fixed positions towards reflective reconsideration of their views. Fishkin (2009) demonstrated empirically that participants in deliberative polls frequently shift their opinions after exposure to balanced information and structured discussion, suggesting that preferences are not merely revealed but actively constructed through the deliberative process. Dryzek (2000) argued that deliberation's legitimacy rests precisely on this transformative potential. Unlike bargaining or voting, which aggregate pre-existing preferences, deliberation enables participants to refine their judgments in light of reasons offered by others. This *preference transformation* is critical to the generation of bridging social capital, for it is through the experience of genuinely reconsidering one's position in response to another's perspective that mutual understanding and trust can develop.

Yet, the dominant Western paradigm of deliberative democracy has been critiqued for privileging particular modes of communication. Iris Marion Young's *Inclusion and Democracy* (2000) offered a powerful corrective, arguing that deliberative theory's emphasis on rational argumentation systematically disadvantaged groups whose cultural traditions favoured alternative communicative forms. Young advocated expanding the deliberative repertoire to include *greeting* (i.e., forms of acknowledgment that establish relationships); *rhetoric* (i.e., emotionally resonant

appeals that situate arguments within shared experiences); and *narrative* (i.e., storytelling that reveals perspectives invisible to dominant frameworks). This expanded conception of deliberative communication proves particularly relevant for multicultural contexts where participants bring diverse communicative traditions to the deliberative space.

1.4 Asian Deliberative Traditions: Comparative Resources

Subsequent deliberative theorists broadened the field in two directions that matter for this report. First, the deliberative systems approach treats deliberation as distributed across arenas and institutions, rather than contained in a single forum (Dryzek, 2000). Second, inclusive public reasoning requires a wider communicative repertoire than analytic argument alone, particularly where marginal experiences and unequal social standing shape who can speak credibly in public (Young, 2000).

Comparative scholarship across Asia contributes to this broadened view by specifying how consultation, counsel and consensus-seeking can function as legitimating practices under different authority relations and social norms. Within East Asian political theory, scholars frame Confucian traditions of counsel and remonstration as a moral-political obligation oriented towards the common good, where the point of speaking is to offer reasoned advice rather than adversarial contestation (Bell, 2006; He & Warren, 2011). In Southeast Asia, research on consensus-oriented decision practices has likewise highlighted both their integrative promise and their democratic vulnerabilities. Concepts of *musyawarah* (deliberative consultation) and *muafakat* (consensus) offer culturally resonant frameworks for collective decision-making that prioritise harmony and unanimous agreement over majoritarian imposition (Antlöv &

Wetterberg, 2022). Together, these strands suggest a conceptual vocabulary for analysing deliberation where hierarchy, relational obligation and moralised public reason remain salient, alongside familiar concerns about domination and exclusion.

This report therefore complements the canonical theory with Asian deliberative lineages as comparative theoretical resources. They help specify the mechanisms through which consensus emerges, and they foreground the conditions under which harmony-oriented talk supports inclusion rather than suppresses dissent.

1.5 Deliberation in Singapore's Civic Context

Singapore's public discourse frames consensus-seeking as a civic ideal that supports governing amid enduring diversity. The 1991 White Paper on Shared Values identified "consensus, not conflict" as one of its shared values, presenting consensus as a normative approach to managing difference in a multi-ethnic society (Singapore Government, 1991). This civic framing aligns with an institutional trajectory that has increasingly formalised public engagement. The state established the Feedback Unit in 1985 and later reorganised it into REACH, expanding engagement through digital channels and community-based formats (Wong, 2025). The state further reinforced this direction through the Singapore Government Partnerships Office (SGPO), which functions as a first stop to connect citizens and groups to agencies and resources, catalyse partnerships and support co-creation of policies (Forward Singapore, 2023; Wong, 2024).

This engagement architecture shapes the conditions under which deliberation operates in Singapore. Public reasoning often reflects a pragmatic political culture that

prizes problem-solving capacity and social stability. Tan (2012) argues that this pragmatic orientation operates ideologically, linking economic openness, governance competence and political order. Singapore's practice also includes recurring, structured public engagements that familiarise citizens with facilitated discussion and participatory inputs, while the state retains decision-making authority. Key examples include the Forward Singapore exercise (Forward Singapore, 2023), the Conversations on Singapore Women's Development (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2022), the public engagement of the Long-Term Plan Review (Urban Redevelopment Authority, 2022), and whole-of-nation mobilisation efforts such as the Singapore Green Plan 2030 (Singapore Green Plan, 2021).

These features make Singapore analytically valuable for assessing whether a carefully scaffolded mini public can do more than elicit views. It can test whether structured deliberation can generate consensus and strengthen bridging social capital across residency status. These considerations motivate this report's research questions and hypotheses, which examine how facilitation, information, and communicative norms shape consensus formation.

1.6 The Consensus Conference Model

The operationalisation of deliberative democratic theory has produced a rich array of institutional innovations, collectively termed *mini publics* (Goodin & Dryzek, 2006). James Fishkin's Deliberative Polling® methodology assembles representative samples of citizens; provides them with balanced information; facilitates structured small-group discussions; enables questioning of expert panels; and measures opinion change through pre- and post-deliberation surveys (Fishkin, 1991, 2009). Citizens'

juries and citizens' assemblies have been deployed to address contested policy questions, with notable examples including the Irish Citizens' Assembly on abortion reform and British Columbia's Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (Gastil & Levine, 2005).

The Consensus Conference model, developed by the Danish Board of Technology in 1987, occupies a distinctive position within this landscape (Grundahl, 1995). Unlike citizens' juries, which typically deliver binding or quasi-binding recommendations to decision-makers, consensus conferences prioritise deep deliberation and social learning over immediate policy outputs. The Danish model assembles 12 to 25 lay citizens for extended engagement over multiple sessions, provides balanced briefing materials, enables participants to question expert panels, and culminates in the collaborative drafting of a consensus statement reflecting the panel's considered judgment.

Critically, the consensus conference model positions deliberation itself as the primary intervention. While the outputs inform policymakers, academics and the broader public, the process generates valuable outcomes independent of any policy implementation: participants develop deeper understanding of complex issues, encounter perspectives different from their own, and potentially build relationships that bridge social divisions. This process-centred orientation makes the consensus conference particularly suited to issues where the immediate goal is strengthening social capital and demonstrating that constructive dialogue across differences is possible.

1.7 The Present Study: A Pilot Consensus Conference

Against this theoretical and contextual background, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Policy Lab, in partnership with REACH, designed and implemented a pilot Consensus Conference on Local-Foreign Integration in Singapore. This initiative represents a deliberate adaptation of the Danish consensus conference model to Singapore's distinctive circumstances, incorporating elements of Fishkin's Deliberative Polling methodology while introducing novel procedural innovations suited to the local context.

The partnership between IPS and REACH itself illustrates *linking capital*: a collaboration between a research institution and the state's citizen engagement mechanism that models the vertical connections between the citizenry and government. This institutional architecture positions the Consensus Conference as a bridge between academic inquiry and policy relevance, between citizens' lived experiences and government responsiveness.

The pilot study assembled 24 participants through quota sampling: 16 Singapore citizens, five foreigners and three permanent residents. This composition was designed to ensure that deliberation occurred genuinely across the local-foreign divide rather than among a homogeneous group discussing those on the other side. The sample size of 24, while modest, falls within the typical range for consensus conferences (12 to 25 participants in the Danish model) and enables the extended, deep engagement that larger samples would preclude. As a pilot study, the findings should be read as illuminative of dynamics within this particular group rather than as generalisable to Singapore's overall resident population. The purpose is to

demonstrate what becomes possible under conditions of structured deliberation, providing a proof of concept that might inform future, larger-scale initiatives.

Participants were provided with balanced briefing materials and access to expert panels addressing four thematic pillars: community life, employment, education and multiculturalism. Trained facilitators, each with more than 10 sessions of and at least five years facilitation experience, guided structured deliberation processes across three in-person sessions.

The study introduced two significant methodological innovations. First, a *perspective-taking protocol* invited participants to consider, through a half-step movement along an agreement spectrum, what conditions might lead them to shift their position in either direction. Drawing on social psychological research on perspective-taking and empathy (Batson, 2009; Galinsky et al., 2005), this intervention sought to facilitate the cognitive and affective processes through which participants might genuinely engage with alternative viewpoints, rather than merely restating entrenched positions.

Second, the consensus threshold was operationalised through a “can live with” standard. Participants were asked whether they could *live with* the statement as drafted — a threshold calibrated between enthusiastic endorsement and reluctant acquiescence. This operationalisation draws on two complementary theoretical traditions. From negotiation theory, the concept of the Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA) provides a framework for identifying the range of outcomes all parties can accept (Fisher et al., 1991). Yet, negotiation theory typically assumes fixed underlying preferences, with the task being to locate overlapping interests. Deliberative theory

offers a crucial supplement: through the iterative process of proposing, amending and refining statements, participants' preferences themselves can shift as they encounter new information and perspectives (Dryzek, 2000; Mansbridge et al., 2012). The "can live with" threshold thus combines the negotiation-theoretic insight that consensus requires, identifying acceptable outcomes with the deliberative-theoretic insight that what counts as acceptable may itself transform through the process. Statements could be iteratively amended through participant proposals until either all 24 participants affirmed that they could live with the statement, or the statement was set aside as a "no-go", having failed to achieve full consensus.

The requirement of 100% consensus represents a deliberately ambitious threshold. The deliberative democracy literature has generally treated full consensus as a regulative ideal rather than an achievable outcome, noting the dangers of forced consensus and the value of productive disagreement (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2006; Sunstein, 2002). Yet the cultural contexts discussed above, including emphases on harmony, consensus-seeking, and collective decision-making, suggest that unanimous agreement may be more achievable in certain cultural settings than Western scholarship has typically assumed. This study examines whether, in Singapore, structured deliberation with quality facilitation enables participants across the local-foreign divide to reach unanimous (100%) consensus on a set of participant-developed statements addressing contested dimensions of local-foreign integration.

2. Local-Foreign Integration in Singapore: Context and Tensions

Understanding the dynamics of local-foreign integration in Singapore requires situating contemporary debates within the historical evolution of foreign workforce policy and the institutional architecture designed to manage integration. This section reviews the policy context, identifies key tensions that surfaced in the Consensus Conference, and locates the study within broader public sentiment regarding integration.

2.1 The Evolution of Foreign Workforce Policy

Singapore's foreign workforce management has evolved through distinct phases, each responding to shifting economic imperatives and demographic pressures. The foundational instruments emerged in the 1980s: the work permit system was formalised to meet labour demand created by rapid growth, the foreign worker levy was piloted in 1980 and expanded comprehensively by 1987, and the dependency ratio ceiling was introduced in 1987 to cap each firm's share of foreign workers (Chia, 2011; Low et al., 1989). These instruments established the twin logics that continue to govern policy: foreign workers augment Singapore's workforce where local supply is insufficient, and calibrated restrictions ensure that reliance on foreign labour does not displace local employment.

The system evolved into a multi-tiered structure from the 1990s onward. The S Pass was introduced in 2004 for mid-level skilled workers (Ng, 2004). The Employment Pass framework was progressively tightened, culminating in the COMPASS points framework from 2023, which assesses salary, qualifications, diversity and employer support for local employment (Ministry of Manpower, 2023). Dedicated routes for

founders and investors, including EntrePass (Ministry of Manpower, 2003) and the Global Investor programme (Singapore Economic Board, 2004), were created to attract entrepreneurial talent. Throughout this evolution, the policy stance has been one of managed openness: welcoming foreign talent where it creates opportunities for Singaporeans while maintaining safeguards to ensure fair treatment of local workers.

The government's articulation of this balance has been consistent. Foreign workers augment the Singapore core[4] by filling persistent gaps in sectors such as construction, marine and process industries, and by anchoring multinational activity that creates high-quality jobs for residents. Over the past decade, resident PMET jobs increased by 382,000 while Employment Pass and S Pass holders increased by 38,000 (Government of Singapore, 2025). The foreign workforce also supports an ageing society by sustaining support ratios: in 2024, the old-age support ratio was 5.2 with foreign workers, compared with approximately 3.5 without them (Government of Singapore, 2025).

2.2 Integration Efforts and Institutional Infrastructure

Parallel to workforce management, Singapore has developed an institutional infrastructure to foster integration of new migrants. The National Integration Council was established in 2009 to coordinate people-private-public initiatives that strengthen interaction between locals and newcomers (Fu, 2012). Integration and Naturalisation Champions — community volunteers under the People's Association — have supported PRs and new citizens through local outreach, ceremonies and welcome activities since 2007 (People's Association, 2022). The Singapore Citizenship Journey

[4] The term 'Singapore Core' refers to Singapore residents, categorized by the Department of Statistics as Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents.

— a compulsory induction for new citizens introduced in 2010 and subsequently refined — aims to foster understanding of Singapore's history, values and social norms (Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, 2021).

These integration efforts occur within a broader framework of differentiated entitlements based on residency status. Singapore citizens receive the most favourable treatment across domains, including healthcare subsidies (up to 80% in public hospitals, compared with up to 50% for PRs and no subsidy for foreigners) (Ministry of Health, 2024); housing access (eligibility to purchase new HDB flats, concessionary HDB loans); and education (lowest fees, automatic tuition grant without bond, Edusave benefits) (Ministry of Education, 2025). In housing, the Additional Buyer's Stamp Duty structure further differentiates: 20% for a citizen's second property, 5% for a PR's first property and 60% for any foreigner purchase (IRAS, 2025). This architecture of differentiated citizenship instantiates a normative hierarchy: Singapore citizens stand at the core, with permanent residents occupying an intermediate position and foreigners positioned as temporary contributors with limited entitlements.

2.3 Latent Tensions and Public Sentiment

Despite these policy calibrations, significant tensions persist in public sentiment regarding local-foreign integration. The 2025 IPS Faultlines study, a survey of approximately 4,000 Singapore citizens and permanent residents, found that if immigration were mismanaged, respondents considered the following consequences. 37.1% of respondents expected it would lead to a fall in trust in government; 37.5% expected anger against particular communities; 35.5% expected decreased national

identity or sense of belonging; 33.3% expected polarisation; and 30.7% expected suspicion or mistrust among communities (Mathew et al., 2025). Notably, Singapore citizens expressed higher concern than permanent residents across most dimensions: 36.8% of citizens (compared with 26.3% of PRs) anticipated that mismanagement would lead to a fall in trust in government, and 36.8% of citizens (compared with 32.0% of PRs) anticipated anger against particular communities.

These survey findings point to underlying anxieties that structured the deliberations in this Consensus Conference. Participants navigated tensions around several recurring themes. In the domain of *employment*, concerns centred on whether Singaporeans receive fair access to jobs and career progression, whether foreign professionals transfer skills to locals, and whether the employment framework adequately protects the Singapore core. In *education*, debates arose around the meaning of meritocracy, the appropriate balance between citizen priority and international diversity in universities, and the framing of subsidies (particularly the term “tuition grant” and its implications for how citizens perceive their standing). In *community life*, participants grappled with mutual expectations: whether foreigners should adapt to local norms, whether locals should extend welcome, and how to move beyond “hi-bye” coexistence towards deeper connection. The domain of *multiculturalism and national identity* proved the most contested, surfacing fears about cultural dilution, the limits of belonging, and whether Singapore’s established multicultural compact could accommodate a growing foreign presence without fundamental renegotiation.

The Consensus Conference was designed to bring these tensions into structured dialogue, enabling participants of different residency statuses to articulate their

concerns, listen to one another, encounter alternative perspectives, and identify whether common ground might exist. The following section details the research design and methodology through which this deliberative process was operationalised.

3. Research Design and Methodology

This section details the research design, including the formulation of research questions and hypotheses, the design of deliberative statements, and the methodological approach to assessing outcomes. Detailed description of participant recruitment, session protocols and analytical methods appears in the subsequent Methodology section.

3.1 Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study examines whether a structured consensus conference can build bridging social capital across residency status in Singapore. We treat bridging social capital as a practical capacity for cross-status cooperation. Drawing on deliberative norms, we posit that this capacity develops through reciprocal listening, public justification and joint problem definition, that can eventually enable collective action (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Putnam, 2000; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

We test this capacity through two demanding behavioural indicators: unanimity on contested statements and subsequent cross-status collaborative action. We also measure bridging social capital directly through pre-post survey and thematic analysis of relational indicators found in the notes and transcripts from recordings of the participants during the conference to support interpretation of the data.

Research Question

Research Question (RQ) 1: To what extent can a structured consensus conference in Singapore produce (a) 100% “can live with” consensus on participant-developed statements addressing contested aspects of local-foreign integration, and (b) subsequent cross-residency collaborative action through a community project?

This question probes the outer limits of deliberative capacity in a diverse, highly urbanised city-state context. The deliberative democracy literature has long grappled with whether genuine consensus is achievable, or even desirable, in pluralistic societies. Gutmann and Thompson (1996) argued that achieving consensus requires more than superficial agreement. It requires reciprocity, where participants take seriously the reasons offered by others. It requires accountability, where participants are willing to justify their positions in terms others can accept. It also requires mutual respect, where participants acknowledge the legitimacy of perspectives they do not share. When these conditions are met, the process of reaching consensus becomes itself a mechanism for building bridging social capital. Participants who engage in listening, perspective-taking and iterative refinement of positions develop relational capacities that extend beyond the immediate deliberative task.

The literature on deliberation has generally expressed scepticism regarding the achievement of consensus across societal divisions. Dryzek (2005) cautioned that forcing consensus in contexts of fundamental disagreement can suppress legitimate difference rather than resolve it. Steiner and colleagues (2004) documented the difficulty of achieving genuine deliberative quality even in parliamentary contexts designed to encourage reasoned exchange. These cautions are well-founded.

However, the evidence base for such scepticism rests largely on Western contexts, where deliberative norms developed within particular cultural and institutional configurations. The relevance of Asian deliberative traditions, and Singapore's distinctive civic culture with its emphasis on pragmatic problem-solving and inter-group harmony, remains underexplored. This study provides empirical evidence on whether consensus is achievable in a non-Western setting characterised by high diversity and a unique cultural and institutional setting.

Hypothesis 1: The Possibility of Consensus

Hypothesis 1 (H1): In Singapore, through structured deliberation and quality facilitation, residents can achieve 100% consensus on statements addressing contested aspects of local-foreign integration.

Quality facilitation refers to facilitators who have led more than 10 facilitated sessions and have at least five years of experience facilitating small-group policy discussions or comparable organisational development sessions. *Residents* refers to Singapore citizens, permanent residents and foreigners. *Consensus* refers to 100% of participants indicating they “can live with” a statement after the final wording is proposed.

H1 makes a strong claim. It predicts that participants will find common ground on some statements that they themselves develop to address contested dimensions of local-foreign integration. The 100% threshold is demanding, precisely because it gives every participant effective veto power; a single holdout prevents consensus. This

design choice reflects both methodological and normative commitments. Methodologically, the unanimity threshold provides a clear behavioural indicator that cannot be achieved through majority pressure or facilitator steering. Normatively, it embodies the deliberative ideal that legitimate collective outcomes must be acceptable to all affected parties, not merely to a winning coalition (Mansbridge et al., 2012).

The hypothesis does not predict that consensus will be achieved on all statements. The consensus conference method explicitly anticipates that some propositions will prove unresolvable, and these are recorded as “no-go zones” alongside the common ground. What H1 predicts is that at least some statements will achieve 100% acceptance, demonstrating that unanimity across residency status is possible when deliberative conditions are met. The process of testing this hypothesis will reveal not only whether consensus is achievable, but also what kinds of statements prove amenable to consensus and what distinguishes resolvable from unresolvable disagreements.

Hypothesis 2: From Deliberation to Collaborative Action

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Despite differing residency statuses and perspectives, participants in the consensus conference can come together to co-create and co-develop a community project in service of others in the community.

H2 extends the analysis beyond the deliberative process itself to examine whether deliberation produces durable effects. The social capital literature suggests that bridging relationships, once formed, can generate ongoing cooperative behaviour that persists beyond the initial context of interaction (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock & Narayan,

2000). Participants who have deliberated together, found common ground and developed mutual understanding should possess relational resources that enable continued collaboration. If this theoretical claim is correct, deliberation should not merely produce consensus on statements but should also generate the practical capacity for joint action.

This hypothesis addresses a significant critique of deliberative mini publics. Lafont argued that such forums suffer from a temporariness problem, where participants convene for a limited period and engage intensively, only to disperse due to a lack of institutional embeddedness (Lafont, 2020). Any relationships or solidarities formed during deliberation may dissipate once the event concludes, leaving no lasting institutional or relational residue. If this critique is correct, deliberative forums may produce momentary consensus without generating the sustained capacity for cooperation that bridging social capital implies. H2 tests whether the consensus conference model, when properly implemented, can catalyse the kind of bridging social capital that manifests in ongoing collaboration rather than dissipating when the sessions end.

The operationalisation of H2 through community project co-development provides a behavioural test that goes beyond attitudinal measures. It is one thing to report improved attitudes towards cross-residency participants on a survey instrument, it is another to actually work with those members on a concrete initiative that requires coordination, compromise and sustained engagement. If participants of differing residency statuses can successfully co-create and advance a community project

following the deliberation, this provides strong evidence that the deliberative experience generated bridging social capital with practical consequences.

The sections that follow describe how the research design operationalises these questions and hypotheses. Together, they provide the evidentiary basis for testing H1 and H2 and for drawing inferences about the capacity of structured deliberation to build bridging social capital across residency status in Singapore.

3.2 Design of Deliberative Statements

Given the latent tensions identified in Section 2.3, the research team designed five statements to structure deliberation across the four thematic pillars (i.e., community life, employment, education, multiculturalism and national identity). The statements were crafted to surface divergent positions, reflect existing policy stances and test the possibility of consensus on issues where perspectives are known to differ. Each statement was designed to contain internal tension, juxtaposing competing values or claims that participants would need to navigate.

The five original statements were:

> **Statement 1 (Community Life):** “Both locals and foreigners should make equal effort in getting to know each other and build deep relationships in the community.”
>
> **Statement 2 (Community Life):** “While foreigners bring their own culture and values to Singapore, foreigners are still expected to follow Singapore's local norms and culture over time.”

Statement 3 (Employment): “Foreign professionals contribute to Singapore's economic growth, but Singaporeans must still be given preferential access to jobs and career progression.”

Statement 4 (Education): “Singaporeans should be given priority at local education institutions, including universities, even as we uphold the principle of meritocracy.”

Statement 5 (Multiculturalism/National Identity): “Singapore's openness to the world and support for multiculturalism and diversity helps us welcome people of different nationalities without losing who we are.”

Due to time constraints, the research team prioritised four statements for deliberation, setting aside Statement 2 in favour of Statement 1 for the community life pillar. This decision reflected a judgment that Statement 1's emphasis on mutual effort mapped more directly onto the integration challenges and therefore warranted priority within the community life pillar.

Each statement was designed to align with the theoretical framework articulated in Section 1. The statements test whether deliberation can generate bridging capital by requiring participants to navigate genuine tensions: between openness and protection (Statements 3 and 4), between cultural adaptation and cultural pluralism (Statement 2) and between cosmopolitan identity and bounded national belonging (Statement 5). The iterative amendment process, guided by the “can live with” threshold, operationalises the deliberative-theoretic claim that preferences can transform through reasoned exchange.

3.3 Site Selection: Changi Simei & East Coast GRC

The study was conducted in the Changi Simei constituency within Singapore's East Coast Group Representation Constituency (GRC). REACH identified the site and introduced the IPS research team to the local Grassroots Adviser and the People's Association. These introductions enabled the research team to recruit participants through existing community networks. The IPS research team designed and conducted the study independently, retaining full control over deliberations, data collection, and analysis.

3.4 Sampling and Participants

The research proposal initially targeted 20 participants, a figure appropriate for an experimental pilot given the novel application of the consensus conference model to Singapore and the procedural unknowns to be managed. The sponsoring grassroots adviser recommended recruiting a larger and more demographically diverse group to enable broad-based deliberation attentive to the specific dynamics of the Changi Simei area. The literature on consensus conferences indicates that optimal panel sizes range from 10 to 25 citizens, with 14 to 16 being the Danish standard (Grundahl, 1995; Hendriks, 2005). Larger groups risk fragmenting into parallel conversations rather than achieving collective synthesis, while smaller groups may lack the diversity of perspectives needed for robust deliberation.

Participants were recruited through a multi-stage outreach process conducted in partnership with the People's Association (PA) and REACH. Recruitment materials with direct sign-up links were disseminated through PA and REACH networks, supplemented by direct flyering in the Changi Simei area. Interested residents

completed a Microsoft Forms questionnaire providing demographic information for eligibility screening and group composition. This recruitment generated substantial interest, with 119 individuals signing up. Of these, 35 met the study's eligibility criteria after initial screening. Subsequent withdrawals (n = 6) reduced the pool to 29 potential participants. Further attrition occurred during the confirmation stage: some prospective participants declined upon learning that the funding partner was a government agency; others withdrew when they understood that the format required active deliberation rather than simply providing inputs. This pattern is consistent with findings from the deliberative mini-publics literature, which documents dropout rates of approximately 20% in multi-session deliberative processes and identifies reluctance to engage with conflicting opinions as a significant predictor of non-participation (Jacquet, 2017; Karjalainen & Rapeli, 2015). The final turnout of 24 participants for Session 1 remained within the optimal range for consensus conference deliberation.

In constructing the sampling frame, particular attention was given to the cultural dynamics of the Changi Simei area. Given that local experiences of integration in this locality were often shaped by perceived juxtapositions between locally born Singaporeans and foreign-born Indians, the sampling frame deliberately oversampled ethnically Indian participants relative to their share of the national population. This theory-driven decision ensured that perspectives most salient to local integration experiences would be adequately represented in deliberations. It also meant corresponding reduction in other ethnic categories, particularly Chinese, though Chinese participants nonetheless remained the majority. The decision to oversample reflects a purposive rather than probability-based sampling logic; the goal was not to construct a statistically representative microcosm of Singapore, but to ensure that the

groups most relevant to Changi Simei's integration dynamics were present in sufficient numbers to engage directly with one another.

The final sample comprised 24 participants with the following characteristics:

Figure 1. Number of participants by sex

Figure 2. Number of participants by age range

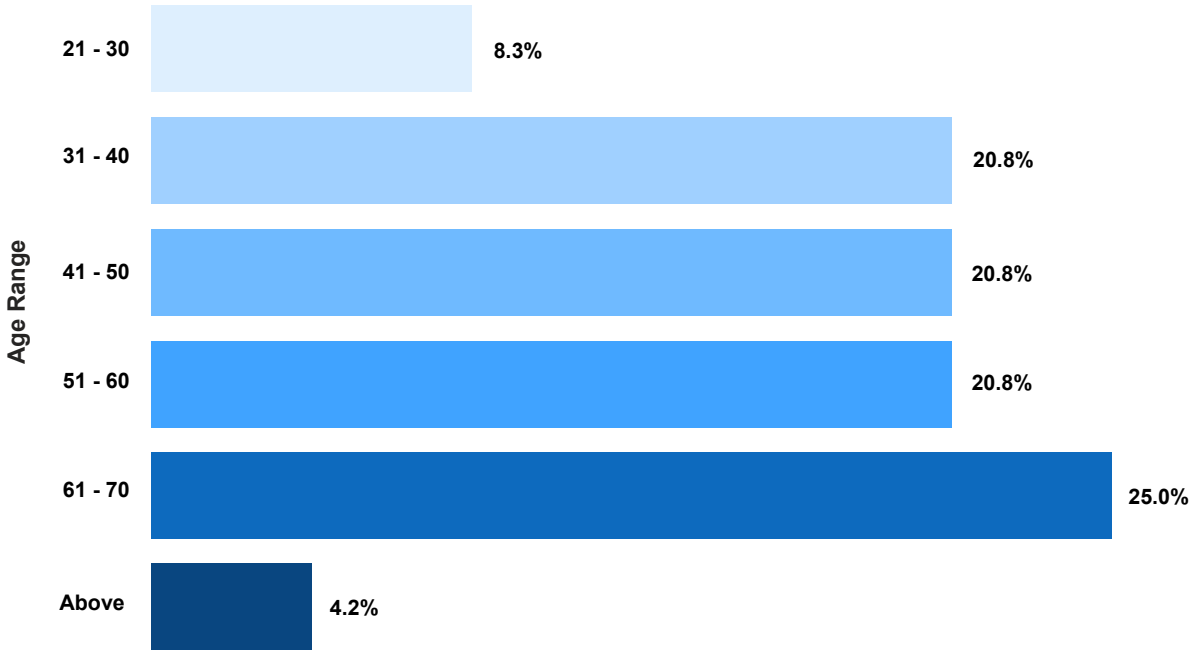


Figure 3. Number of participants by residency status

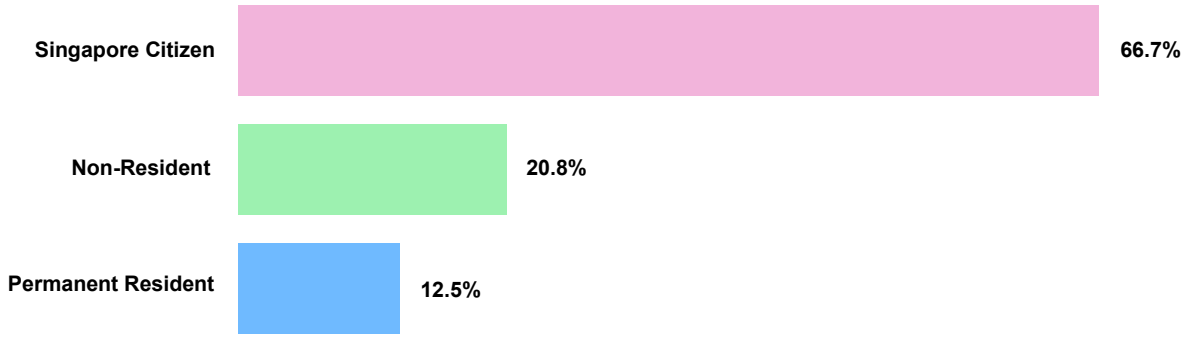


Figure 4. Number of participants by ethnicity

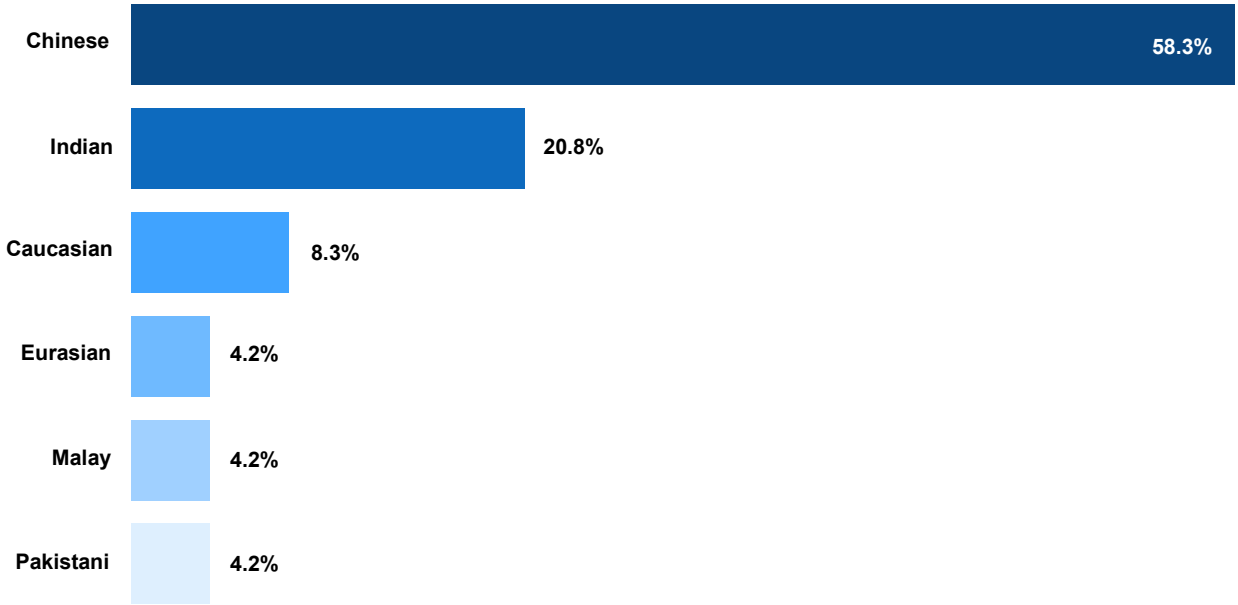


Figure 5. Number of participants by education level

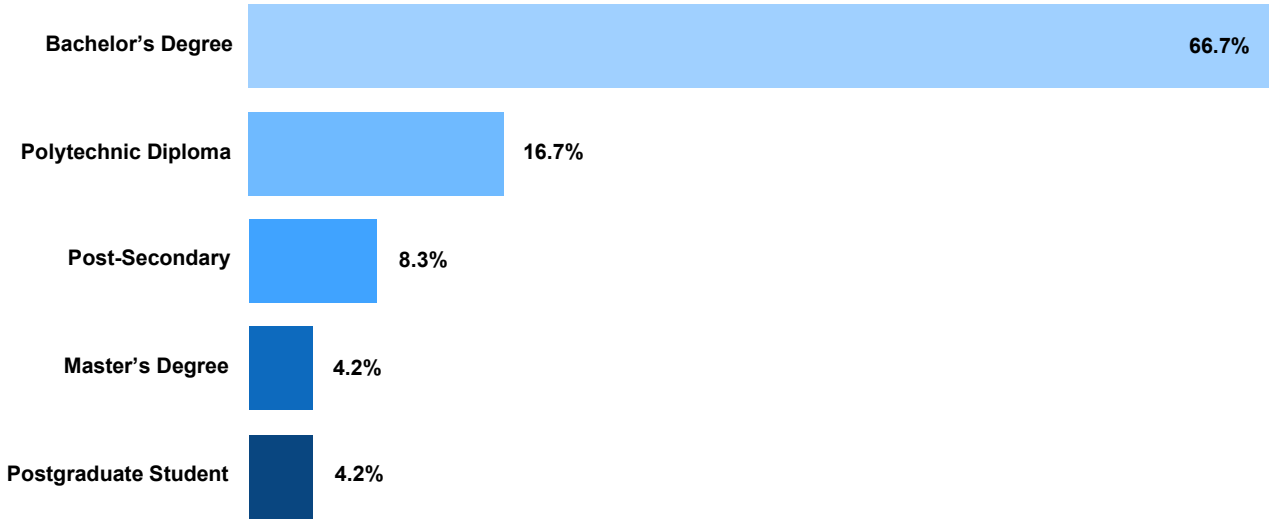


Figure 6. Number of participants by job type

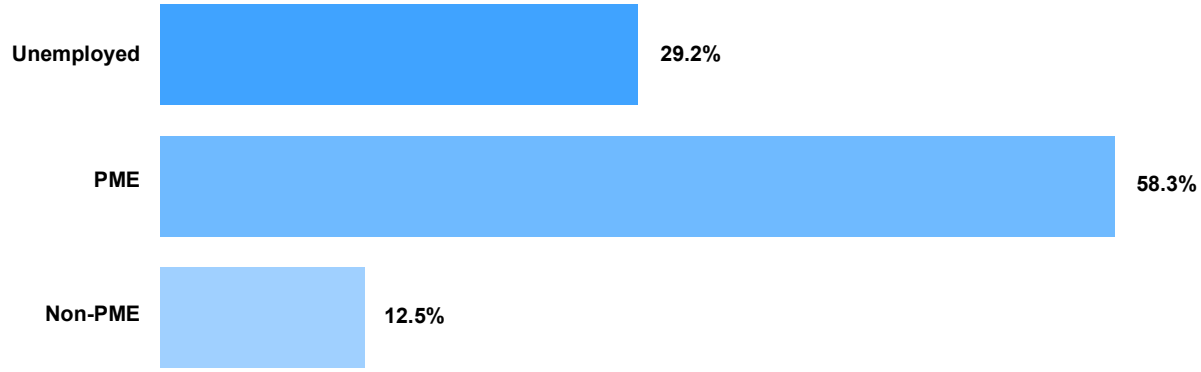
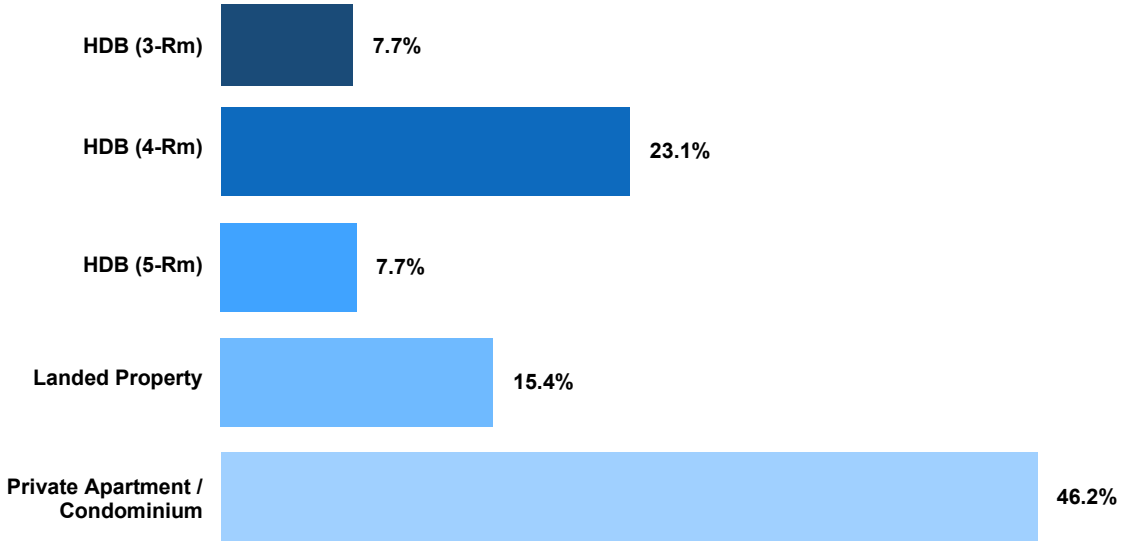


Figure 7. Number of participants by housing type



Residency status: Singapore citizens (local-born) constituted 62.5% (n = 15), with one naturalised citizen (4.2%). Permanent residents comprised 12.5% (n = 3) and non-residents 20.8% (n = 5), of whom four held Employment Passes and one held a Long-Term Visit Pass. This distribution ensured meaningful representation across the residency spectrum central to local-foreign dynamics.

Ethnicity: Chinese participants made up 58.3% (n = 14) of the total participants, underrepresenting their share of Singapore's resident population (74%) (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2025). Indian participants at 20.8% (n = 5) were overrepresented relative to the national share (exceeding by about 9%) to enable direct engagement on local-foreign dynamics particularly salient in the Changi Simei context. Malay, Eurasian, Pakistani and Caucasian participants (n = 5 combined) provided additional perspectives.

Sex: The sample achieved near-parity, with 54.2% male (n = 13) and 45.8% female (n = 11) participants.

As a pilot study employing quota sampling, findings from this study only illuminate dynamics within this particular deliberative context rather than create generalisable patterns across Singapore's population. The purpose is to demonstrate what becomes possible under conditions of structured deliberation, providing a proof of concept that might inform future, larger-scale initiatives.

3.5 Instrumentation

The study employed pre- and post-deliberation surveys administered via Qualtrics to assess changes in participants' attitudes, perceptions and behavioural intentions. The pre-deliberation survey established baseline measures of interest in local-foreign issues; interaction patterns with people of different backgrounds; trust in society and government; attitudes towards the chosen deliberative statements; and openness to diverse perspectives. The post-deliberation survey repeated these measures to detect shifts, and additionally captured participants' evaluations of process quality; learning outcomes; sense of empowerment; perceived legitimacy and feasibility of the common ground statements; and intentions for future civic engagement.

The instrument drew on established constructs from the social capital and deliberative democracy literatures. Items assessing bridging social capital measured engagement across differences and openness to diverse perspectives, operationalising Putnam's (2000) conceptualisation of cross-cutting social ties. Items assessing linking social

capital gauged perceived voice and responsiveness in state-society relations, drawing on Woolcock's (1998) analysis of vertical connections between citizens and institutions and Levi and Stoker's (2000) work on political trust. Methodologically, the instrument employed five-point Likert scales for attitudinal items and dichotomous questions for factual and behavioural items. Given the small sample size, the analysis emphasises effect sizes and patterns of change rather than statistical significance testing, with variance used to track dispersion and potential convergence between groups (DeVellis, 2016).

3.6 Facilitation and Training

The quality of facilitation is widely recognised as critical to deliberative outcomes. Research on procedural justice in deliberation demonstrates that participants' perceptions of fairness and their subsequent engagement are shaped substantially by how facilitators manage the discussion process (Chang & Zhang, 2021; Gastil, 2008; Zhang & Chang, 2014). Fishkin (2009) emphasises that facilitators must maintain strict neutrality, guiding procedural aspects of discussion without contributing substantively or signalling preferred positions. The facilitator's role is to ensure that all voices are heard, that no participant dominates, and that the group remains focused on the deliberative task.

Accordingly, this study invested substantially in facilitator preparation. All facilitators participated in a three-hour training session that included an overview of deliberative theory and the consensus conference model, detailed review of the facilitation guide, simulation exercises requiring facilitators to manage challenging scenarios, and question-and-answer sessions to clarify expectations. Facilitators were debriefed after

each session to ensure consistency across groups, identify emerging challenges and refine approaches for subsequent sessions. Their role was strictly procedural: to maintain inclusive engagement, manage time and record group inputs without contributing substantive views that might influence outcomes.

Note-takers received parallel training. Five note-takers were briefed on the study's objectives, the coding scheme, and documentation requirements. Drawing on Young's (2000) typology of communicative forms in deliberative contexts, note-takers were trained to recognise and document not only rational-critical argumentation but also emotive expression and narrative testimony, capturing the full repertoire of deliberative contributions. This theoretical grounding enabled documentation of both the content of deliberation and the communicative forms through which participants engaged. Note-takers participated in simulation exercises and were debriefed alongside facilitators after each session.

The lead Principal Investigator (PI) served as lead facilitator, a configuration that deliberative scholars have noted can support process integrity when the researcher has deep familiarity with both the theoretical framework and procedural requirements (Fishkin, 2009). To mitigate potential bias, the PI maintained the same procedural discipline as other facilitators, the research team engaged in collective debriefing after each session, and findings were triangulated across multiple data sources.

3.7 Data Collection and Analysis

The dataset comprised five components: (1) pre- and post-deliberation survey responses; (2) audio recordings and transcripts of small- and large-group discussions;

(3) facilitator notes and counts of “can live with” versus “cannot live with” positions; (4) written materials generated by small groups, including proposed statements and amendments; and (5) participant-authored documents, including the Residents' Report and community project proposals.

Quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics on demographic data and comparison of pre- and post-deliberation mean scores on attitudinal items. Changes were analysed by comparing post-deliberation responses against pre-deliberation baselines, with variance used to track dispersion and potential convergence between groups differentiated by residency status.

Qualitative analysis employed a hybrid deductive-inductive approach. Deductive codes were derived from the theoretical framework and tied to the four deliberative statements and overarching themes of local-foreign relations. Inductive codes captured emergent framings, tensions and reasoning patterns. Deliberations were coded in real time as participants spoke, enabling the research team to trace how views evolved, stabilised or shifted through discussions. This approach aligns with best practices in deliberative process analysis, which emphasise tracking the trajectory of arguments and positions over time rather than treating deliberative outcomes as static endpoints (Steenbergen et al., 2003; Bächtiger et al., 2010).

3.8 Participant Ownership and Reflexivity

All audio recordings, transcripts and group artefacts were retained by the research team for analysis and for compiling the Residents' Report. Critically, researchers did not participate in writing the report, preserving participant ownership of all content.

This design choice reflects deliberative theory's emphasis on participant autonomy and the legitimacy that derives from citizen-generated outputs. As Fung (2003) and Mansbridge (2012) argue, the democratic value of deliberative processes depends substantially on participants retaining control over the conclusions and recommendations that emerge from their deliberations. Researcher abstention from content generation ensured that the report authentically represented the collective judgment of the deliberating group.

The Residents' Report Writing Group, comprising eight participants (two representing each statement), synthesised discussion outputs into a coherent draft. Other participants were invited to review and edit the draft via a shared document, contributing over 80 edits. A Zoom session resolved outstanding interpretive questions before finalisation. Participants were individually contacted to confirm whether they consented to having their names included, reinforcing voluntary attribution. The report was presented to the REACH Chair and the local grassroots adviser in final form by the participants at Session 4.

The research team maintained a reflective stance during analysis, attending to how facilitation, group composition, and framing may have shaped deliberative dynamics. This reflexivity was particularly important given the lead PI's role as lead facilitator. The team addressed potential bias through collective sense-making in debriefs, triangulation across data sources, and explicit documentation of analytical decisions.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

All participants provided written informed consent after receiving detailed explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Data were pseudonymised at the point of collection, with electronic records stored on encrypted, password-protected servers accessible only to the research team. The study design was optimised to minimise psychological burden and, given the potentially sensitive nature of discussions about local-foreign relations, facilitators were trained to manage tensions constructively and ensure all participants felt respected regardless of their views. No conflicts of interest were declared. The Departmental Ethics Review Committee at the Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore, reviewed and approved the research protocol, participant information sheet and informed consent forms prior to data collection.

3.10 Process Chronology

Recruitment

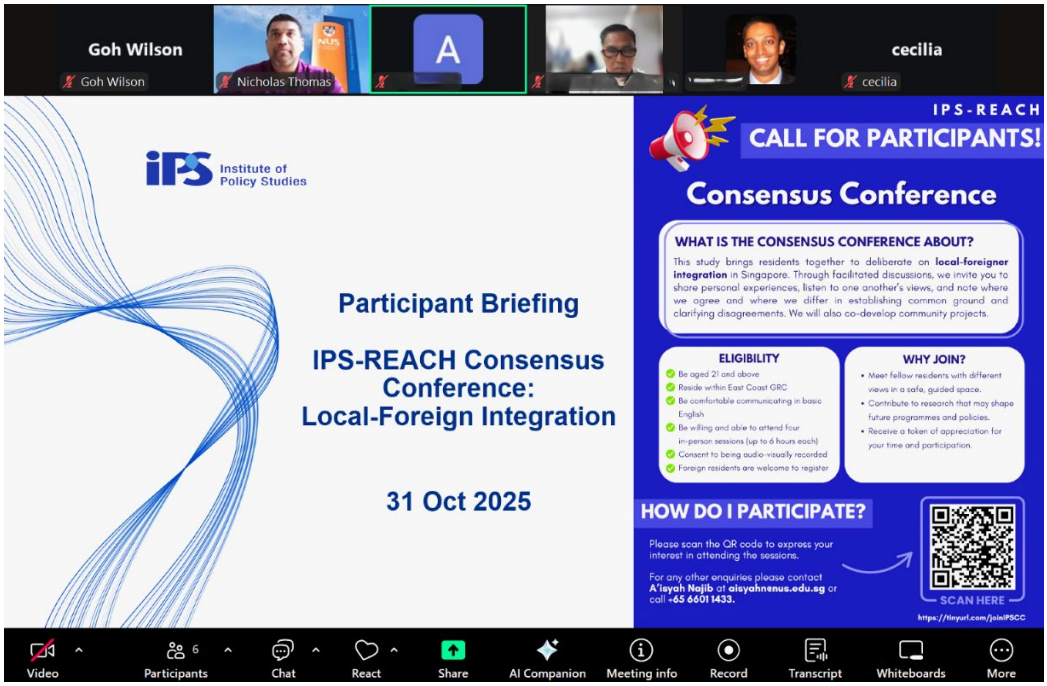
Participants were recruited through a multi-stage, outreach-based process conducted in partnership with the People’s Association (PA) and REACH. Recruitment posters with direct sign-up links were disseminated through PA and REACH networks, and the research team additionally distributed flyers in the Changi Simei area to broaden community reach. Interested residents were directed to a Microsoft Forms link, where they submitted demographic information used to determine eligibility and to support later group composition.

Figure 8. Distributing recruitment flyers in the Changi Simei neighbourhood

Pre-Session Briefing

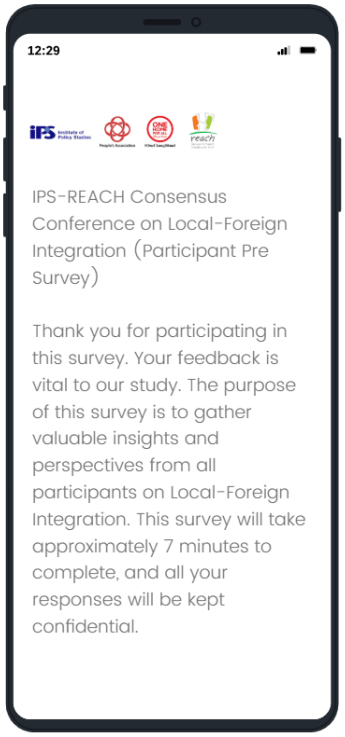
Eligible respondents were invited to attend a pre-study briefing session, during which the research team explained the purpose of the study, the expected time commitment, and the structure of the deliberative process.

Figure 9. Screenshot of eligible respondents attending a pre-study briefing held online



Pre-Deliberation Survey

Figure 10. Screenshot of the pre-deliberation survey start page



Prior to the commencement of the Consensus Conference, all confirmed participants completed a pre-deliberation survey designed to capture baseline attitudes and perceptions related to local–foreigner integration. The survey assessed participants' initial views on trust, belonging, openness to diversity, and comfort with engaging differing perspectives.

The results of this pre-deliberation survey were then tested against responses to the same set of questions administered as in the post-deliberation survey, allowing for comparison of attitudes and perceptions before and after participation in the Consensus Conference.

Session 1: Establishing the Deliberative Foundation (8 November 2025)

Session 1 established the informational, procedural and relational foundations that underpinned the study design and gave procedural form to the research question and hypotheses. Research Question 1 (RQ1) asks whether a structured consensus conference can produce 100% consensus on some contested statements and subsequent cross-residency collaborative action. Hypothesis 1 (H1) predicts that through structured deliberation and quality facilitation, residents can achieve such consensus. Hypothesis 2 (H2) predicts that despite differing residency statuses, participants can come together to co-create a community project. Session 1 therefore prioritised three enabling conditions. The first was *procedural clarity*, so that participants understood the rules of engagement and could hold one another accountable to shared standards. The second was *epistemic grounding*, so that participants deliberated from a common informational baseline rather than from divergent or inaccurate premises. The third was *psychological safety*, so that participants could articulate positions, offer reasons, and revise views without fear of judgment or loss of face.

These foundations draw on established deliberative theory. Fishkin's work on deliberative designs emphasises balanced information, opportunities to question evidence, and structured discussion as conditions for considered judgment rather than top-of-mind reaction (Chang & Zhang, 2021; Fishkin, 2009; Luskin, Fishkin & Jowell, 2002). Gutmann and Thompson (1996) emphasise reciprocity, mutual respect and accountability as the normative conditions under which participants can justify claims to one another and revise views without coercion. Putnam's account of bridging social capital adds a further lens, suggesting that repeated cross-cutting interaction can

reduce friction across social difference and enable cooperation across lines of identity and status (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). With this base, Session 1 was designed to create conditions conducive to both consensus-building (H1) and the formation of bridging ties that could sustain collaborative action (H2).

Procedural Grounding: Purpose, Safeguards and Expectations

Before deliberation began, the lead facilitator restated the study's purpose and the overall consensus conference design, consistent with the pre-session briefings. Participants were briefed that the study examines how local and foreign residents interact and integrate within community settings in Singapore, with the goal of identifying areas of common ground and shared understanding while also clarifying areas of disagreement. The lead facilitator explained that participation would help the research team assess whether people with different residency statuses and lived experiences can engage in meaningful dialogue, co-create common ground statements, and sustain collaboration beyond the forum. This framing explicitly connected participant contributions to both hypotheses, signalling that the process aimed not only at statement consensus (H1) but also at the formation of relationships that could support subsequent collaborative action (H2).

The session then addressed privacy and confidentiality. Participants were informed that only the research team would have access to personal data. Personal data would be stored securely and disposed of after the research report was finalised. Audio recordings would be made only with consent and deleted after transcription. The lead facilitator also explained the study timeline and incentives, including session dates, transport allowances, and the completion incentive. This procedural grounding served

a deliberative function by clarifying expectations, reducing uncertainty and supporting psychological safety. It also helped establish accountability conditions under which participants can speak candidly, listen seriously and accept outcomes as legitimate even amid disagreement (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996).

Finally, the lead facilitator introduced the consensus conference method as a structured process where participants deliberate on a contentious public issue over multiple sessions, engage with background materials and an expert, and work towards statements of common ground that participants can accept as credible and workable. This framing aimed to orientate participants towards reason-giving and mutual justification rather than positional debate, supporting the conditions for preference reflection and revision that deliberative designs seek to elicit (Fishkin, 2009).

Opening Check-In: Voice and Civic Orientation

After the procedural briefing, the session began with a plenary check-in. Each participant shared their name, why they chose to take part and one hope for the conference. The round-robin format gave every participant an early, equal speaking turn and established norms of reciprocal listening. The format also signalled that the forum welcomed candid contributions across viewpoints, including critical perspectives, because every participant spoke in turn without interruption or filtering. By beginning with motivations and hopes, the session fostered interpersonal recognition and oriented participants towards a shared civic purpose before they engaged contested claims (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996).

Information Provision and Epistemic Grounding

Figure 11. Dr Mathews Mathew (IPS) presenting the introductory briefing to participants before the start of the deliberative sessions

The session then moved to an introductory briefing by Dr Mathews Mathew, Head of IPS Social Lab and Principal Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies. Dr Mathew presented findings from IPS Social Lab studies on local-foreigner relations and related population sentiments. The briefing anchored subsequent discussion in accessible empirical patterns, clarified what existing evidence can and cannot support, and offered a shared reference point for participants who arrived with different experiences and information environments. This epistemic grounding is particularly

important for testing H1. If participants are to achieve 100% consensus, they must deliberate from accurate premises rather than from misinformation or mutual misunderstanding about factual matters. A 45-minute question-and-answer segment with Dr Mathew followed. Participants used this segment to probe assumptions, request clarification, and test factual claims before deliberation began.

This sequence aligns with deliberative design arguments that participants are more likely to form considered judgments when they can interrogate evidence and clarify contested claims in a structured setting (Fishkin, 2009; Luskin et al., 2002).

Relational Grounding and Psychological Safety

Session 1 included a dedicated relational grounding sequence before participants moved into the deliberative process where they would contest content with one another. The research team designed this sequence to establish early voice norms, lower the social barrier to cross-residency interaction, and build sufficient familiarity for participants to disagree without defensiveness. These relational investments were particularly important for H2, which predicts that participants can form bridging ties sufficient to sustain collaborative action. Such ties are unlikely to form if participants interact only in formal deliberative exchanges without opportunities for informal connection.

Plenary "Singapore Map" activity. The lead facilitator conducted a plenary "Singapore Map" activity with all 24 participants. Participants identified meaningful places in Singapore, including favourite neighbourhood spaces, preferred dining spots and locations they would introduce to a visiting friend. The exercise surfaced shared

attachments and everyday reference points across participants before discussion shifted to more sensitive issues. This whole-group format helped create an initial sense of common place in Singapore's social space, a foundation that could support both consensus-building (H1) and collaborative action (H2).

Small-group check-in and communal lunch. After the plenary activity, the research team assigned participants to their small deliberation groups, ahead of the substantive deliberation. Each group included Singapore citizens, permanent residents and foreigners, and the study maintained this mixed-status small group composition across sessions. The groups then completed a structured small-group check-in facilitated by trained facilitators over lunch. Facilitators actively lowered the participation barrier by using simple turn-taking, so each participant spoke, and by supporting inclusive interaction during the meal so no one was left out.

This sequencing served a deliberative function. Early equal speaking turns and low-stakes interaction support mutual recognition and respect, which Gutmann and Thompson (1996) treat as enabling conditions for productive disagreement. In social capital terms, the small-group check-in and shared meal created early opportunities for bridging ties across residency status by encouraging participants to relate as individuals rather than as category representatives (Putnam, 2000). These informal interactions laid groundwork for the cross-residency collaboration that H2 predicts.

Shared Informational Baseline for Statement 1

After lunch, participants referred to the information kit provided to participants ahead of the sessions. It compiled publicly available background material on relevant policies

and programmes related to local-foreigner integration in Singapore. The kit served as a shared reference point. The research team framed it as baseline information to support deliberation and made it explicit that the content was not intended to prescribe what participants should conclude or believe. The objective was to ensure that participants began deliberation from a shared base of accessible information, reducing the risk of misinformation or misunderstandings.

Immediately before deliberation on Statement 1, the research team provided a 10-minute context-setting briefing specific to the statement, followed by plenary clarification questions. This structured clarification phase allowed participants to confirm shared definitions and factual premises so that subsequent discussions in the small groups could focus on personal positions, values and lived experience. Participants remained free to weigh the information differently and to contest its implications. The design aim was procedural fairness and informational symmetry at the starting line, consistent with deliberative approaches that treat informed questioning as a condition for high-quality reason-giving (Fishkin, 2009; Luskin et al., 2002; Zhang & Chang, 2014). For H1, this shared baseline increased the likelihood that any consensus achieved would reflect genuine agreement rather than confusion about terms.

Small-Group Deliberation on Statement 1

Following the grounding phase, the research team assigned participants to four small groups of six. Each group had up to two trained facilitators and a dedicated note-taker. Session 1 focused on Statement 1, which addressed community life.

Statement 1: "Both locals and foreigners should make equal effort in getting to know each other and build deep relationships in the community."

The small-group process followed a structured process designed to make reasons explicit, map conditions for movement, and translate emerging common ground into candidate statements that participants could “live with”. This process operationalised a core mechanism of preference transformation in deliberative theory. Participants articulate the conditions under which their views could shift, test those conditions against others' reasons and revise formulations until they reach legitimate accommodation (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Mercier & Landemore, 2012). The process was designed to test H1 by creating structured opportunities for participants to deliberate and generate common ground statements that all could accept.

Step 1. Initial position and reasons. Each participant stated an initial position on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and provided a reason. Participants could give reasons through analytic explanation, emotion, lived-experience narratives, alone or in combination. Facilitators treated all three as legitimate inputs to public reasoning, consistent with Young (2000). Since participants had already recorded their views in the pre-survey on their positions for the statements, they could easily respond with their first position and its underlying rationale. This step established a baseline against which subsequent movement could be assessed.

Step 2. Bidirectional movement and condition mapping. Participants then completed a structured movement exercise to identify the conditions that could shift their stance in either direction, eliciting conditional preferences that often remain implicit in ordinary conversation.

Movement towards disagreement. Participants were invited to take a half-step towards “strongly disagree” and responded to the question, “What would it take for you to move down?” If a participant reported difficulty in moving their position, facilitators invited a minimal shift (for example, 0.1) and asked what could justify it.

Movement towards stronger agreement. Participants returned to their original position, and then took a half-step towards “strongly agree”, and responded to the question, “What would it take for you to move up?”

Facilitators captured the expressed conditions, concerns, and aspirations on flipcharts. Epistemically, the exercise required participants to specify what evidence, emotion or experience would warrant revision and to consider countervailing reasons (Mercier & Landemore, 2012). Relationally, the exercise separated expressed positions from their justificatory grounds. Participants who occupied divergent points on the preference spectrum often appealed to overlapping underlying concerns, even when their stated stances differed. Making these shared rationales visible helped the group identify plausible “can live with” formulations that preserved disagreement while clarifying what could be jointly affirmed. This design feature operationalised H1 by creating a structured pathway to common-ground language across residency statuses despite divergent starting positions.

Step 3. Statement drafting. Participants reviewed the mapped conditions and were invited to propose up to two statements that resonated with them personally, and that they believed the small group could “live with”. The “can live with” threshold functions as the working definition of consensus in this study. It requires acceptance sufficient to proceed together without veto. This threshold aligns with deliberative accounts that treat legitimate collective outputs as compatible with principled accommodation under reciprocity (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Mansbridge et al., 2012). It also provides a demanding test of H1 because it requires 100% acceptance rather than majority support.

Step 4. Small-group validation and revision. Facilitators tested each proposed statement through a structured round-robin validation. For each statement, they asked every participant: “Can you live with this statement?” When a participant could not, facilitators invited them to explain why. Participants could respond in analytic terms, through emotion or via a brief narrative grounded in lived experience. Facilitators then asked the participant to propose a concrete revision that would make the statement acceptable. The facilitators confirmed that the original proposer could accept the revision, then repeated the validation round. If the proposer could not accept the revision, the group recorded the statement as “no-go”.

The facilitator instructions included an important safeguard against false consensus. If a participant indicated they could live with a statement but had expressed a differing view in the earlier conversation, the facilitator was to invite that view back into the conversation to clarify. This instruction was designed to prevent conformity pressure from producing superficial agreement that masked genuine reservation. For H1, this

safeguard ensured that any consensus achieved reflected authentic acceptance rather than social accommodation.

The process recorded outcomes as follows. Statements that achieved 100% “can live with” acceptance in the small group were recorded as *common ground*. Statements that remained unacceptable to at least one participant after attempted revisions were recorded as *no-go*. This sequence operationalised reciprocity and accountability by requiring participants to justify both agreement and refusal in terms others could address (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Young, 2000). It also ensured that minority constraints remained deliberatively relevant rather than being overridden, which aligns with the unanimity threshold embedded in H1.

Figure 12. Small-group deliberations showing participants in discussion, supported by facilitators and a note-taker (seated with laptop)

Plenary Validation and Consolidation

Step 5. Large-group validation. Statements that achieved small-group common ground were uploaded to a shared digital platform (Google Slides) and carried into plenary deliberation among all 24 participants. The plenary used a movement-based validation procedure. Participants indicated whether they could live with a statement by moving to the “can live with” or “cannot live with” side of the room. Participants who could not live with a statement articulated their concerns and proposed amendments. The plenary then retested the amended statement, using the same round-robin “can live with” format used in the small groups. This procedure increased visibility and accountability (Gastil, 2008).

The design also anticipated a potential trade-off: visible stance-taking can amplify conformity pressure in settings, where harmony norms shape participation. To manage this risk, the lead facilitator repeatedly normalised uncertainty and dissent. They invited participants to move to the “cannot live with” zone when they felt unsure, wanted clarification or sensed an intuitive discomfort they could not yet fully articulate. They also reminded participants to move to “can live with” only when they genuinely accepted the statement. These facilitation moves reduced social pressure and protected space for open disagreement, including disagreement expressed through emotion or lived experience.

The session therefore paired the movement procedure with facilitation norms that protected dissent and included an explicit process evaluation item on pressure to conform. This safeguard was important for ensuring that any consensus achieved (H1) reflected genuine acceptance rather than social pressure.

For descriptive reporting, the plenary classified outcomes into three categories. “Can live with” indicated that 100% of participants accepted the statement. “Near consensus” indicated broad acceptance with up to three participant holdouts (at least 85%). “No-go” indicated that multiple participants rejected the statement. The study treats only the “can live with” category as meeting the 100% threshold specified in H1.

Figure 13. Large-group deliberation process showing participants indicating their stance by moving to the “can live with” or “cannot live with” sides

Structured Personal and Group Reflection

The session concluded with structured reflection in small groups. Participants wrote privately in their info-kit journals and then shared responses to three prompts. The first asked what they found challenging and why. The second asked what they found uplifting. The third asked what became clearer through the discussion. This closing sequence helped participants decompress after difficult exchanges and generated qualitative material on how they experienced cross-residency deliberation. It also

captured relational dynamics relevant to H2, including whether participants perceived the deliberative experience as strengthening connection across residency statuses.

Session Evaluation

Participants completed a brief evaluation of six process dimensions. These included opportunities to express views; whether others gave fair consideration to their views; whether they could speak without fear of judgment or pressure to conform; whether facilitators supported a safe discussion climate; whether facilitators recorded views clearly and respectfully even amid disagreement; and whether the session provided sufficient time for deliberation. These measures provided process evidence on whether Session 1 met minimum deliberative conditions associated with reasoned exchange. They also assessed the quality of facilitation specified in H1 and the relational climate relevant to H2.

Session 1 thus established the foundational conditions for testing both hypotheses. For H1, it provided information, clarified procedures and introduced the “can live with” protocol through which consensus would be assessed. For H2, it created early opportunities for cross-status interaction and mutual recognition that could support the formation of bridging ties. Subsequent sessions would build on these foundations as participants deliberated on additional statements and moved towards both consensus outputs and collaborative action.

Session 2: Jobs and Education (9 November 2025)

Session 2 applied the deliberative architecture established in Session 1 to two additional statements addressing employment and education. These two statements engaged distributional concerns that the deliberative-democratic literature identifies as especially difficult to resolve. Gutmann and Thompson (1996) argue that enduring moral disagreement is particularly evident in controversies over the allocation of scarce resources, because such decisions must reconcile competing, reasonable claims under conditions of scarcity. By deliberating on employment and education, Session 2 provided a stringent test of H1's prediction that 100% consensus is achievable on contested aspects of local-foreign integration.

Large Group Check-In

The session opened with a brief plenary check-in to re-establish the deliberative setting and extend equal voice into Session 2. Using a round-robin format, each participant spoke in turn, with facilitators protecting uninterrupted speaking time and reciprocal listening. This structure renewed symmetrical opportunity to speak and reinforced the expectation that participants could express supportive, critical or uncertain views without filtering. In procedural terms, the check-in instantiated key speech conditions for perceived procedural fairness by securing free proposal and equal opportunity at the outset (Chang & Zhang, 2021; Zhang & Chang, 2014).

The check-in also oriented participants towards a shared civic purpose before engaging distributional questions on employment and education. By foregrounding motivations and hopes rather than immediate position-taking, the session maintained

a cooperative frame and created a relational baseline for subsequent disagreement (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996).

Statement 2 on Employment

The session began with a 10-minute context-setting briefing specific to the employment statement, followed by plenary clarification questions. This structured clarification phase mirrored the approach used in Session 1, ensuring that all participants began deliberation from a shared informational baseline. The research team maintained this consistent pre-deliberation framing across all statements to support procedural fairness and informational symmetry (Chang & Zhang, 2021; Fishkin, 2009; Luskin et al., 2002; Zhang & Chang, 2014).

Deliberation then focused on Statement 2, which addressed employment.

Statement 2: “Foreign professionals contribute to Singapore’s economic growth, but Singaporeans must still be given preferential access to jobs and career progression.”

This statement engaged concerns about labour market competition that public and online discourse in Singapore has often framed as zero-sum. The deliberative sequence followed the same protocol established in Session 1. Participants stated their initial positions and reasons, completed the bidirectional movement exercise, drafted candidate statements, and tested them through small-group and large-group validation using the “can live with” threshold.

The movement exercises proved particularly revealing for this statement. When facilitators asked participants what it would take to move towards stronger agreement, several articulated conditions related to implementation mechanisms, timeframes, and definitions of “preferential”. When asked what it would take to move towards disagreement, participants surfaced concerns about economic competitiveness, talent attraction and the practical difficulties of operationalising preference without compromising meritocracy. The small-group process revealed that specific language choices proved contentious, including the word “preferential” and the phrase “career progression”. Participants negotiated amendments through the iterative process, testing whether alternative formulations could achieve acceptance across residency statuses.

Figure 14. Small-group deliberations showing participants in discussion during session 2

Group Lunch and Relational Maintenance

Participants had lunch in their small groups. This design choice was intentional. The employment statement had surfaced tensions that participants experienced viscerally, with some articulating frustration or anxiety about job competition. The group lunch provided an opportunity for relational repair and informal processing after a difficult exchange. It also tested whether participants could sustain community across difference, remaining in constructive relationship despite disagreement on a sensitive, sometimes polarising points of view. This relational maintenance is directly relevant to H2, which predicts that participants can form bridging ties sufficient for collaborative action. Such ties must be robust enough to withstand the friction that accompanies genuine disagreement on contested issues (Putnam, 2000; Mutz, 2006).

Statement 3 on Education

Following lunch, the research team provided a 10-minute context-setting briefing specific to the education statement, followed by plenary clarification questions. This consistent pre-deliberation framing ensured that participants approached the education statement with the same informational symmetry established for previous statements.

Participants then deliberated on Statement 3, which addressed education.

Statement 3: “Singaporeans should be given priority at local education institutions, including universities, even as we uphold the principle of meritocracy.”

This statement placed two widely endorsed values in tension. Priority for citizens implies differentiation based on nationality, while meritocracy implies differentiation based on achievement. The deliberative sequence surfaced the underlying assumptions participants held about the relationship between these principles. Some participants treated the principles as complementary, arguing that priority could function as a tiebreaker among equally qualified candidates without compromising meritocratic selection. Others treated the principles as conflicting, arguing that any nationality-based criterion necessarily departs from pure merit-based assessment.

The movement exercises revealed that participants' willingness to shift position depended heavily on how "priority" was operationalised. Participants who initially disagreed with the statement indicated they could move towards agreement if priority meant advantage at the margins rather than categorical exclusion. Participants who initially agreed indicated they could move towards disagreement if priority undermined Singapore's reputation for meritocratic excellence. These conditional preferences, surfaced through the structured movement exercise, enabled the group to identify formulations that preserved the tension between values while specifying acceptable boundaries.

Session Evaluation

The Session 2 evaluation expanded from six to nine items. The original six items, carried forward from Session 1, had three new items added to assess whether the process helped participants better understand perspectives different from their own, whether they felt progress was made in identifying both common ground and no-go zones, and whether they felt more connected to the group after the discussions.

These additions captured dimensions of perspective-taking and social connection that theory suggests should accompany quality deliberation. Perspective-taking is central to the reciprocity that Gutmann and Thompson (1996) identify as central to genuine deliberation. Social connection is relevant to the bridging social capital that H2 predicts will emerge from cross-residency deliberation.

The session concluded with a large group check-out, where participants shared one thing they were grateful for. This closing ritual reinforced the relational dimensions of the deliberative process and provided a transition out of the intensive deliberative work.

Session 3: Identity, Report Writing and Community Projects (15 November 2025)

Session 3 occurred one week after Session 2, allowing participants time to reflect on the deliberative work completed thus far. The session completed deliberation on the final statement, then transitioned participants into two parallel action-oriented tracks. This structure reflected both research questions. The deliberative component continued to test whether 100% consensus was achievable on contested statements (H1), while the community project and report writing tracks directly tested whether deliberation generates the bridging social capital necessary for collaborative action (H2).

New Small Groups and Check-In

Participants were assigned to new small groups for Session 3 (each group with 6 participants comprising Singapore citizens, permanent residents and foreigners). This enabled them to deliberate with a different mix of fellow participants. This design

choice served multiple functions. It exposed participants to a wider range of perspectives across the four-session process. It prevented small-group dynamics from calcifying into fixed coalitions. It also created new opportunities for cross-residency relationship formation, directly operationalising H2 that participants can develop bridging ties sufficient for collaborative action. By the end of Session 3, each participant would have deliberated in depth with a broader cross-section of the participant pool.

The session began with a small-group check-in using two reflection questions. The first asked what participants found challenging or difficult to find common ground on in previous sessions, and why. The second asked what was becoming clearer for them. This reflective opening served to reconnect participants with the deliberative work already accomplished and to surface any unresolved tensions that might inform the final deliberation. It also allowed participants in the newly composed groups to learn from one another's experiences in different Session 1 and 2 small groups.

Statement 4 on Multiculturalism

The research team provided a 10-minute context-setting briefing specific to the multiculturalism statement, followed by plenary clarification questions. This maintained the consistent pre-deliberation framing established across all statements.

Deliberation then focused on Statement 4, which addressed multiculturalism and openness.

Statement 4: “Singapore’s openness to the world and support for multiculturalism and diversity helps us welcome people of different nationalities without losing who we are.”

This statement engaged questions of identity and belonging that deliberative theorists have argued require careful facilitation. Dryzek (2005) cautioned that deliberation on identity-laden topics risks essentialising group boundaries or suppressing internal diversity within groups. The facilitation approach therefore emphasised personal voice. Facilitators invited participants to start with “I” and to articulate their personal view rather than speaking as representatives of residency categories.

The Session 3 deliberative process built on participants’ accumulated experience with the process. By the third session, participants understood the rhythm of stating positions, engaging movement questions, drafting statements and testing them through validation rounds. This familiarity allowed the process to move more fluidly while maintaining deliberative rigour. In small groups, facilitators drew a five-point line on a flipchart ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Participants indicated their position on the line and explained their reasoning, drawing on analytic explanation, emotion or lived experience as they chose. They then engaged the movement questions, articulating what it would take to move up or down by half a step.

Following the movement exercise, participants engaged in 10 minutes of personal statement drafting in silence. The facilitator instructions emphasised holding silence during this period to allow individual processing without social influence. The subsequent 30-minute Socratic process followed the same structured sequence as the previous two sessions.

The large-group process followed, with statements that achieved small-group consensus tested with all 24 participants using the same movement-based validation procedure established in earlier sessions.

Figure 15. Large group deliberations on statements during session 3. Participants whose statements were chosen were given the chance to explain their statements before the group indicates their stance on whether they "can live with it" or "cannot live with it".

Unstructured Lunch

Lunch on Session 3 was intentionally unstructured, in contrast to the facilitated small-group lunches of earlier sessions. Participants chose their own seating and conversation partners. This design choice served two functions. It allowed participants to process the morning's deliberation informally with whomever they wished. It also provided a naturalistic test of whether bridging ties had formed across residency statuses. If H2's prediction held, participants would choose to sit with others across

residency lines, not merely with those who shared their status. The research team observed seating patterns without intervening, generating qualitative evidence on cross-residency relationship formation.

Parallel Tracks

Following lunch and a framing session, participants divided into two parallel tracks. The division represented a distinctive feature of this consensus conference design. Rather than having all participants engage in a single collective activity, the design allowed for differentiated contributions based on participant interests and skills. Both tracks provided opportunities for cross-residency collaboration, directly testing H2.

The Residents' Report Writing Group comprised eight participants who volunteered for the task. The group included three foreigners and five Singapore citizens, with two participants representing each statement theme. This mixed-residency composition was essential for testing H2. If participants of different residency statuses could collaborate effectively on synthesising and articulating the deliberative outputs, this would provide evidence that bridging ties had formed.

The Writing Group began synthesising deliberative outputs into a coherent draft report. They received all consolidated statements and deliberation summaries and worked collaboratively to structure the document, ensuring that both common ground and no-go zones were faithfully represented. The writing process was supported by the research team in a procedural capacity only. The research team helped organise content and referred to anonymised transcripts for accuracy but did not contribute to the writing of the document. This constraint operationalised the participant ownership

that Fung (2003) argues is essential for deliberative legitimacy. The report would be authored by citizens, not researchers.

The Writing Group presented their initial draft to the full group midway through the session, enabling collective feedback and validation. Participants who were not part of the Writing Group could identify gaps, request clarifications, or flag misrepresentations. A second presentation occurred near the session‘s end to confirm directions and ensure the draft accurately reflected the group‘s deliberative work.

Figure 16. Participant-led report writing group discussions during session 3

The Community Project Group convened concurrently to translate deliberative outcomes into practical initiatives. This track directly tested H2's prediction that deliberation across the local-foreign divide can generate bridging social capital sufficient for collaborative action. If participants could move from deliberation to joint project development, this would demonstrate that the deliberative experience produced relational capacity with practical consequences.

Figure 17. Participant-led community project group discussions during session 3

The process began with an Open Space Technology process, a facilitation method that allows participants to self-organise around topics of shared interest (Owen, 2008). Participants brainstormed ideas responding to three prompting questions in relation to the areas of common ground they developed. The first asked how locals and foreigners in Changi Simei and East Coast might find like-minded neighbours and make friends. The second asked how residents, both Singaporean and foreign, might

team up to solve everyday neighbourhood challenges. The third asked how to build a community where all residents thrive and no one feels alone, whether Singaporean or foreigner. These questions were designed to elicit project ideas that would require cross-residency collaboration, providing a direct test of H2.

Following individual brainstorming, each proposer pitched their idea to the group. Participants then voted by placing up to three dots on the ideas they would like to support and be part of. The most supported ideas formed the basis for project development groups. Each project group worked through a structured template addressing five questions. These covered what the project would do, for whom, where, when and how many participants it would reach. They addressed what activities participants would do together and who would run it. They specified what outcomes the project would achieve and what need it addressed. They identified what would require financial support, and they clarified who would be accountable and what the next steps would be.

By the end of the session, two project proposals had been developed. These initiatives were anchored in the common ground statements identified during deliberations. The successful development of these proposals provides initial evidence for H2, demonstrating that participants of diverse residency statuses were able to collaborate on concrete initiatives following their deliberative experience. This action orientation connects the mini public‘s deliberative work to potential real-world implementation, addressing critiques that deliberative forums often lack consequential uptake (Lafont, 2020).

Final Check-Out

Session 3 concluded with a final check-out where participants shared one thing or person they were grateful for and one thing they were looking forward to. This closing ritual served functions identified in the deliberative facilitation literature. It provided emotional closure after intensive deliberative work, reinforced relational bonds and mutual understanding formed during the process, and oriented participants towards the future rather than leaving them suspended in unresolved tension, or what the literature terms the 'Groan Zone' [5](Kaner et al., 2014).

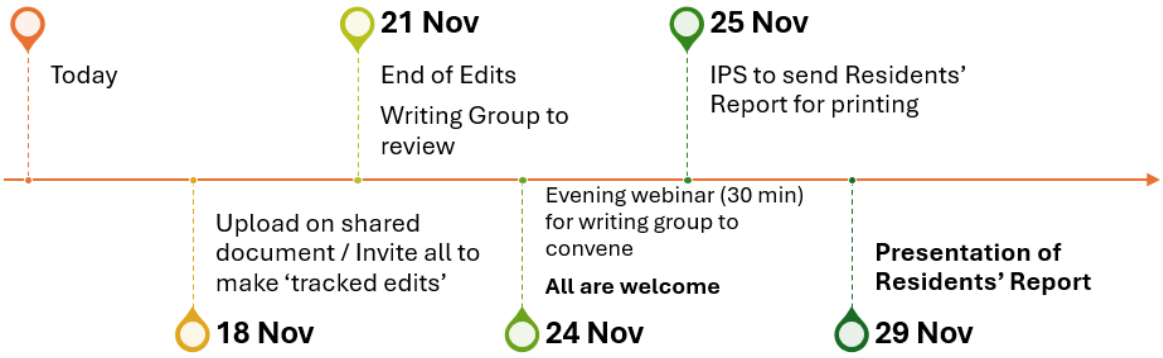
The forward-looking prompt, asking what participants were looking forward to, was particularly relevant for H2. It invited participants to articulate continued engagement with the process, the relationships formed, or the collaborative work ahead.

Inter-Session Period: Residents' Report Refinement and Validation

A 14-day interval between Sessions 3 and 4 was deliberately built in to allow for report refinement and continued participant engagement. This extended validation process ensured that the Residents' Report was not merely authored but genuinely owned by participants, with multiple opportunities for input and revision. The inter-session period also provided evidence relevant to H2. If bridging ties had formed during deliberation, participants should remain engaged with the collaborative work even outside the structured session environment.

[5] Kaner et al. (2014) describe the 'Groan Zone' as the confusing and often frustrating middle phase of participatory decision-making in which group members struggle to understand and integrate their diverse perspectives to create a shared framework, a process that is uncomfortable but necessary for building sustainable agreements.

Figure 18. Timeline for Residents' Report



Days 1 through 4. The Writing Group produced a first full draft on Google Docs, consolidating discussion outputs and structuring the report around the four statement themes. The collaborative writing process required ongoing coordination among group members across residency statuses, providing continued evidence for H2.

Day 4. All participants, beyond the Writing Group, were formally invited to review the draft and provide edits, clarifications, or comments via the shared document. This invitation extended ownership beyond the Writing Group to the full participant pool.

Days 5 through 8. Participant inputs were consolidated. By Day 8, a revised draft incorporating over 80 participant edits had been prepared. The volume of edits suggests that participants exercised their ownership actively, engaging substantively with the document rather than passively accepting the Writing Group's draft. This level of engagement provides additional evidence for the participant investment that both hypotheses predict.

Day 9. A Zoom session was convened by the research team to help the Writing Group resolve interpretive questions and ensure the revised draft accurately reflected deliberations and agreed positions. This session functioned as a final collective sense-check, maintaining the deliberative norm that outputs should reflect genuine participant agreement rather than researcher interpretation.

Days 10 to 12. For participants who had not yet acknowledged or made edits on the report, the research team made individual contact to confirm consent for name attribution in the final residents' report. This step reinforced voluntary participation and informed consent at each stage, ensuring that no participant‘s name appeared without explicit approval.

Day 13. The report was sent for printing in preparation for presentation at Session 4.

Figure 19. Screenshot of the Writing Group and other participants collaborating on the report

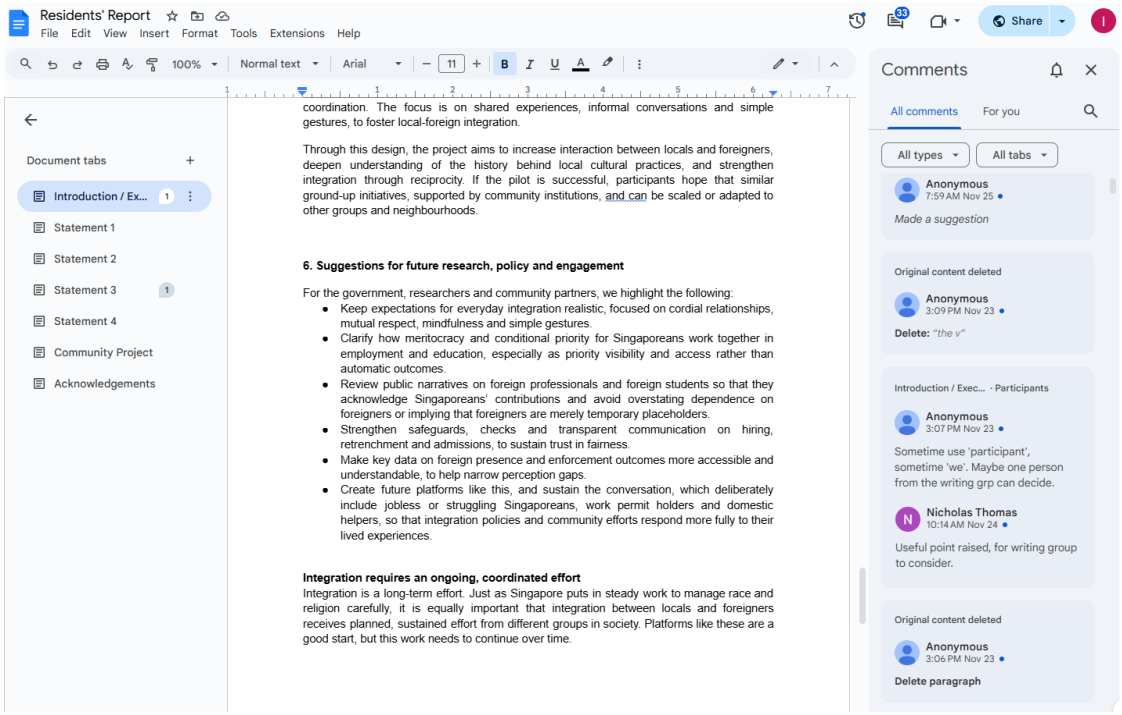
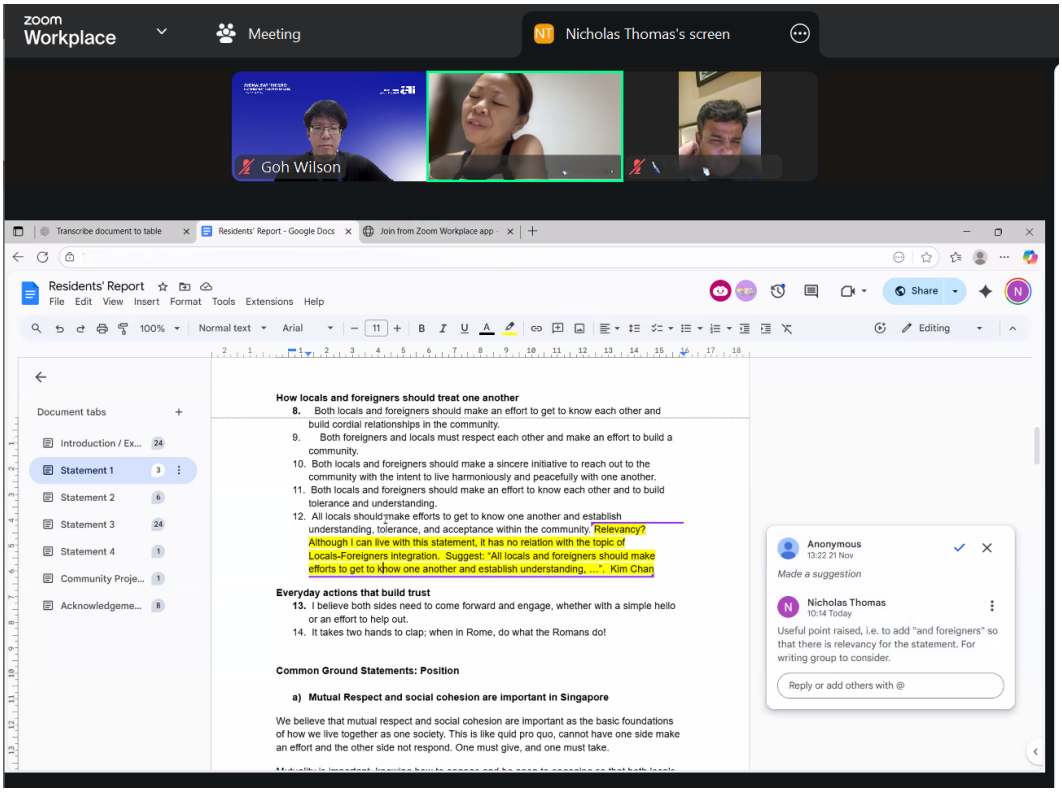


Figure 20. Screenshot of the Writing Group convening on a Zoom call to review and edit the draft of the Residents' Report with the comments provided by other participants



Session 4: Presentation and Closure (29 November 2025)

The final session presented the completed Residents' Report and community project proposals to government representatives. This presentation constitutes what Dryzek and Tucker (2008) term the "transmission belt" that connects mini-public deliberation to policy consideration. The presence of government representatives signalled that the deliberative outputs would receive attention beyond the research context, though the study design is not intended to, nor does it include tracking of subsequent policy uptake.

Presentations

Participants presented the Residents' Report to Senior Minister of State (SMS) Tan Kiat How, who served as Chair of REACH, and to Jessica Tan, Grassroots Adviser for Changi Simei. The presentation was delivered by participants themselves instead of the researchers, maintaining the principle of participant ownership throughout. The Community Project Group then pitched their proposed initiatives, and how they would foster continued cross-residency collaboration.

Figure 21. Participants from the Writing Group presenting the final Residents' Report to SMS and Changi Simei Grassroots Adviser

Figure 22. Closing session where participants presented the final Residents' Report and pitched their proposed community project to SMS Tan Kiat How and Adviser Jessica Tan

Distribution of the Residents' Report

The session concluded with distribution of the published Residents' Report to all participants. The physical report represented the tangible output of the deliberative process, a document authored by residents that captured both common ground and no-go zones. Each participant received a copy bearing their name among the listed authors — a recognition of their contribution to the collaborative work.

Figure 23. The Residents' Report, compiled from participant-generated statements, deliberation summaries, and community project proposals

Post-Deliberation Survey

Following presentations, the participants completed the post-deliberation survey via Qualtrics. This survey mirrored the pre-deliberation instrument, enabling comparison of attitudes and perceptions before and after the deliberative experience. The survey captured post-deliberation positions on the four statements, allowing assessment of whether individual attitudes shifted through deliberation. It also captured perceptions

of trust, social connection and willingness to engage in future cross-residency collaboration, which provided quantitative evidence relevant to H2. This marked formal completion of the data collection phase.

3.11 Significance

This pilot study contributes to policy, scholarship and practice in several ways. For policymakers, the study examines whether deliberative approaches can help manage tensions accompanying demographic diversification while strengthening social cohesion. Working through a partner such as IPS provides credible convening, methodological discipline and translation of deliberative outputs into actionable intelligence, while enabling experimentation with sensitive dialogue formats at lower reputational risk for agencies. The Consensus Conference also has applicability beyond local-foreign integration: issues cutting to identity, dignity and belonging, including race and religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, and other value-laden questions. These often require sustained dialogue to reduce misrecognition and surface what different groups can accept as legitimate, especially when the outcome is to strengthen mutual understanding rather than an immediate policy intervention.

Theoretically, the study extends the social capital literature by examining whether deliberative processes can generate bridging capital in diverse urban contexts and contributes to deliberation scholarship by testing whether institutions designed in Western contexts can be adapted to Asian settings where cultural resources may enable outcomes that Western theory has deemed unattainable. Methodologically, it introduces and tests procedural innovations, including the “can live with” consensus

threshold and the participant-led report writing process, that may prove transferable to other deliberative contexts.

4. Findings from the Consensus Conference

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings from the IPS-REACH Consensus Conference and evaluates them against the study's hypotheses. The central research experiment was whether structured deliberation could build bridging social capital across the local-foreign divide in Singapore, a context that was underexplored.

The study tested two hypotheses. H1 predicted that through structured deliberation and quality facilitation, residents can achieve 100% consensus on statements addressing contested aspects of local-foreign integration. H2 predicted that despite differing residency statuses and perspectives, participants can come together to co-create a community project in service of local-foreign integration.

These hypotheses engaged longstanding debates in deliberative theory. As outlined in Chapter 2, sceptics have argued that deliberation across deep identity-based divisions may suppress legitimate difference rather than resolve it, that consensus achieved through deliberation may reflect conformity pressure rather than genuine agreement, and that participants in deliberative mini-publics rarely translate their experience into sustained civic action. Optimists counter that well-designed deliberation can build mutual understanding across differences, that properly facilitated processes can protect minority views, and that deliberation can catalyse civic engagement beyond the deliberative setting itself. The Singapore context added further theoretical interest given its distinctive civic culture emphasising pragmatic problem-solving and inter-group harmony.

4.2 Participant profile

Chapter 3 presented the full demographic profile of the 24 participants who were recruited for the Consensus Conference. To summarise briefly: the sample comprised sixteen Singapore citizens (66.7%), three permanent residents (12.5%) and five non-resident foreigners (20.8%). Participants spanned ages 23 to 77, with a median age of 54. The sample was highly educated, with over 70% holding at least a bachelor's degree. The male-female split was nearly equal, with elven females (45.8% female), and thirteen males (54.2% male).

Attendance across the four sessions was strong. Sessions 1, 2 and 4 achieved 100% attendance (24 of 24 participants). Session 3 began with 23 participants after one participant informed of a personal exigency and could not attend. Mid-way through Session 3, a second participant needed to leave due to illness, reducing attendance to 22. These attendance figures indicate high participant commitment to the deliberative process.

In interpreting the findings that follow, three characteristics of the sample warrant attention. First, the sample skewed older than the general population, with 70.8% aged over 40 and 25% aged 61 to 70. This maturity may have contributed to the deliberative quality observed, as older participants often brought extensive workplace and community experience to the discussions. Second, the high education levels meant participants were comfortable with structured deliberation and written consensus statements. Third, the self-selected nature of participation likely captured residents with above-average civic commitment. These characteristics should be borne in mind when considering generalisability.

4.3 Participants achieved 100% consensus on 23 of 67 participant-generated statements, with sharp variation across topic domains

The headline finding was that participants achieved 100% consensus on 23 statements across the four topic domains, from a total of 67 participant-generated statements that reached large-group deliberation. This 34.3% overall consensus rate masked significant variation by topic that carries theoretical and practical implications.

Community life achieved the highest consensus rate at 77.8% (14 out of 18 statements). Jobs achieved 22.2% (4 out of 18 statements). Education achieved 25.0% (4 out of 16 statements). Multiculturalism achieved only 6.7% (1 out of 15 statements).

This pattern of domain variation warranted close examination. The deliberative democracy literature has long distinguished between interest-based conflicts, which concern the distribution of material goods and may be amenable to bargaining and compromise, and identity-based conflicts, which concern fundamental questions of belonging and recognition and may be more resistant to resolution (Dryzek, 2005; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). The IPS-REACH Consensus Conference data provided empirical data to illustrate this distinction.

Community life statements achieved high consensus because they were aspirational and symmetrical. Statements such as “Both locals and foreigners should make an effort to get to know each other and build cordial relationships in the community” imposed obligations on both groups equally and did not require allocation of scarce

resources. They expressed shared values rather than adjudicating competing claims. Jobs and Education statements involved more direct trade-offs over university places and employment opportunities; yet, participants found agreement through conditional formulations that specified the circumstances under which citizen priority would apply. Multiculturalism statements touched on identity and belonging at a deeper level, addressing questions such as who defines Singaporean culture and whether long-term foreign residents can ever fully belong. These questions proved most resistant to consensus.

The following sections examine each domain in turn, documenting both the tensions that emerged during deliberation and the common ground that participants were able to identify.

Table 1. Number of consensus statements by topic and group over all 3 deliberative sessions

Topic	No. of Consensus Statements from Group 1	No. of Consensus Statements from Group 2	No. of Consensus Statements from Group 3	No. of Consensus Statements from Group 4	Total No. of Consensus Statements for Large Group Deliberation	Final No. of Statements with 100% Consensus
Community Life	**5**	**4**	**6**	**3**	**18**	**14**
Jobs	**6**	**6**	**1**	**5**	**18**	**4**
Education	**5**	**4**	**1**	**6**	**16**	**4**
Multiculturalism	**2**	**4**	**3**	**6**	**15**	**1**
Total	**18**	**18**	**11**	**20**	**67**	**23**

Figure 24. Number of statements from small group deliberations for each topic over all sessions

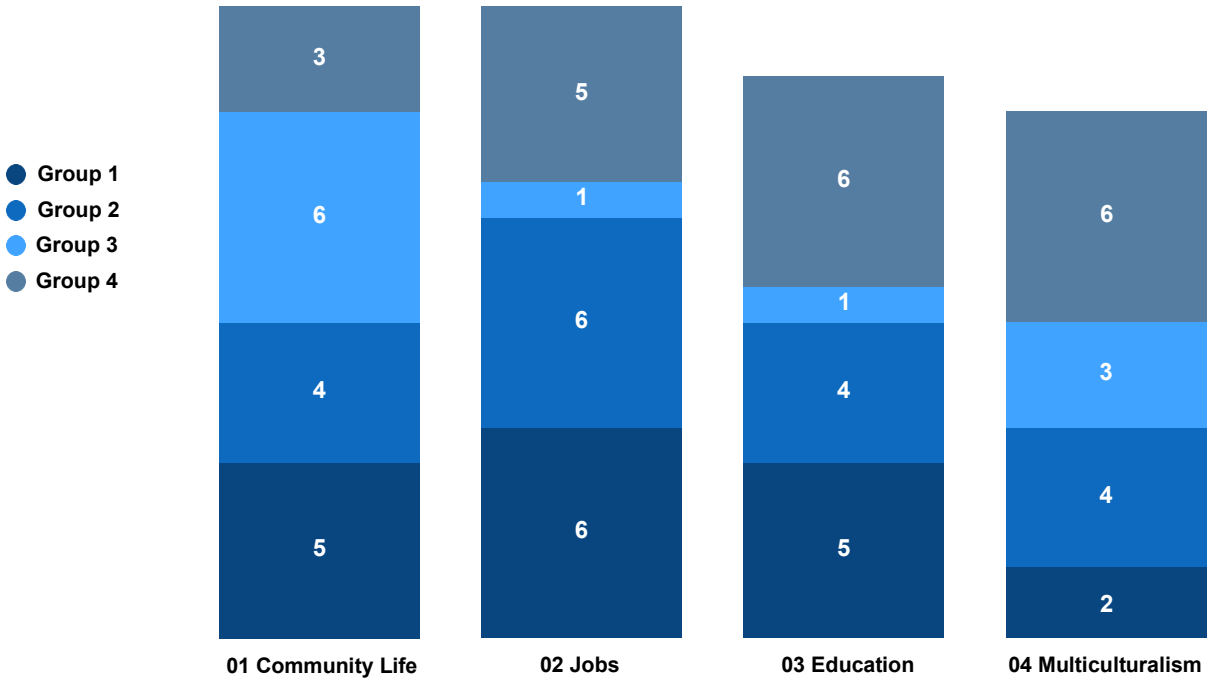
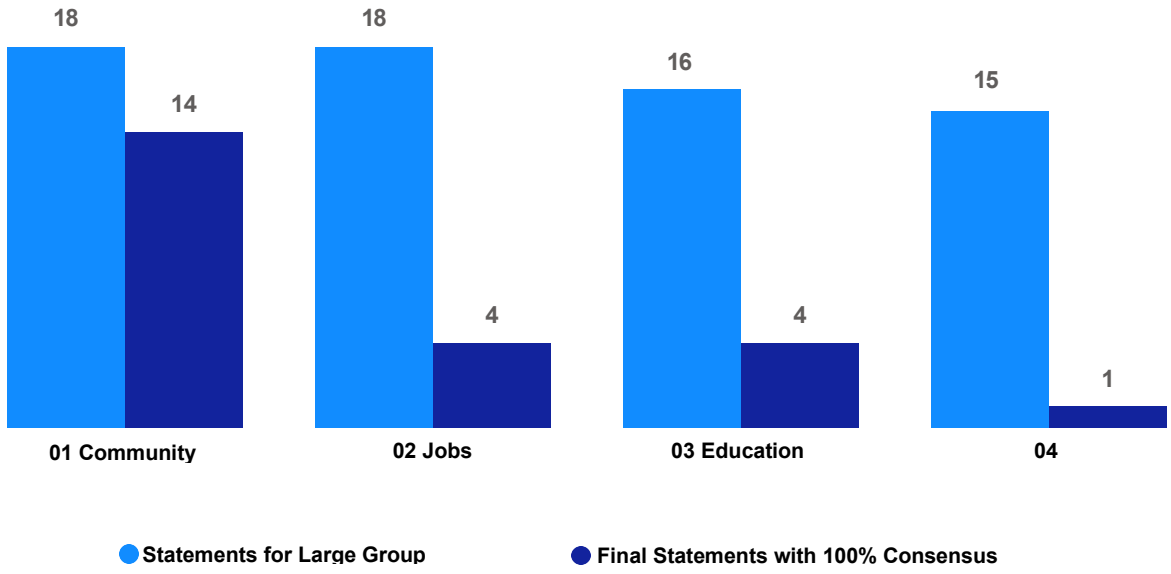


Figure 25. Number of statements for large group deliberations vs number of final statements



4.4. Community life achieved the highest consensus rate, with participants describing “hi-bye” coexistence that was peaceful but shallow

The community life domain achieved the highest consensus rate at 77.8%, with 14 of 18 statements reaching full agreement. This high rate reflected the aspirational and symmetrical nature of the statements, which addressed dispositions and behaviours rather than resource allocation. Participants could agree on norms of mutual effort and respect even while acknowledging that current reality fell short of those ideals.

Participants described neighbourhood interactions as “hi-bye” coexistence characterised by tolerance without thick trust

At the neighbourhood level, participants described a largely peaceful coexistence between locals and foreigners. Open conflict was rare in the estates represented. However, social ties were shallow, with few participants reporting deep, mixed-residency friendships in their immediate neighbourhoods. The pattern that emerged was one of tolerance without thick trust, a stable equilibrium that nonetheless left residents as strangers to one another.

> *“Like in my estate, there are more foreigners than local.... How do we get to know each other? When they open their door, and I happen to go there ‘Hi! Good morning!’, things like that… exchange a little bit of pleasantries, but that's all.”* (Singaporean, male, 56, Chinese)

This description of superficial contact was echoed by multiple participants across residency statuses. The “hi-bye” characterisation captured a form of civil indifference: residents acknowledged one another’s presence but did not develop relationships of mutual understanding or interdependence. This pattern aligns with findings from the IPS-OnePeople.sg 2024 study, which documented shrinking friendship circles among Singapore residents, with the average number of close friends declining, alongside a

slight drop in the share of respondents reporting at least one close friend of another race.

Some participants identified generational patterns in attitudes towards foreigners. The observation that anti-foreigner sentiment clustered among older, retired residents who spent more time in common spaces suggested that life stage and daily routines shaped exposure to and attitudes about the foreign presence in estates.

> *"In my estate, the ones with the biggest opinions are those retirees, Singaporean retirees, who stay home, got many."* (Singaporean, male, 58, Chinese)

Foreign professionals who worked long hours reported little opportunity to integrate beyond transactional encounters. Notably, one Singaporean participant expressed understanding of this constraint, attributing limited integration less to lack of interest than to structural pressures facing Employment Pass holders.

> *"Our interaction and friction always come from the EP holders instead, it's not the blue-collar workers. It's never blue-collar workers, actually, it's the interaction with the educated, for now lah, is the educated middle-class Indians…. It's not that they can't be bothered. Is that they're on a time (pause) they're on a time sheet. They've got three years to prove themselves, and then they meet that resume, right."* (Singaporean, male, 58, Chinese)

This observation introduced an important nuance. The perceived aloofness of foreign professionals might reflect rational response to visa conditions and career pressures

rather than dispositional disinterest in local community. Employment Pass holders face demanding work schedules and must demonstrate ongoing value to employers to secure visa renewals. Time invested in neighbourhood relationships may be time unavailable for career-building activities that determine whether they can remain in Singapore at all.

A non-resident participant acknowledged the role of intent in integration, offering a candid assessment that community-building required genuine commitment rather than purely transactional presence.

> *"I mean, if the individuals are having the intent to mingle, I mean, that is the only way where you can build a community. So, if there's no intent, I mean, if the intent is that I come here, I work, I earn, I go. Right? So, I will not be part of the community."* (Non-resident, male, 40, Indian)

The result was a low-conflict but fragile equilibrium. Participants accepted one another's presence in shared spaces but rarely described deep cross-status relationships. Grievances were suppressed rather than addressed, finding outlet in online forums rather than direct conversation.

> *"Singaporeans just kind of quell with anger* [sic] *when a Chinese speaks loudly on the phone and then they complain on Reddit.... We can't blame them but maybe we need to, I mean, in Singapore, we need to make those expectations clearer."* (Singaporean, male, 30, Chinese)

This observation pointed to a gap between public civility and private frustration. The norms of public behaviour in Singapore, which emphasise avoiding open

confrontation, meant that irritations accumulated without direct address. Online platforms became outlets for grievances that were suppressed in face-to-face interaction. This pattern of thin civility masking unexpressed tensions represented a risk factor: relationships that had never been tested might prove fragile when strained.

Consensus statements on community life emphasised mutual effort and reciprocal responsibility

Despite these observations about shallow relationships, participants across residency statuses endorsed the view that both locals and foreigners bore responsibility for building cohesive communities. The statements that achieved consensus shared a common structure: they imposed symmetrical obligations and expressed aspirational norms without requiring resource allocation.

> *"I would make an effort to try to get to know [them]. And then hopefully, both sides reciprocate to make a compromise."* (Singaporean, female, 61, Chinese)

Participants observed that foreign colleagues sometimes organised celebrations within their own national groups. There was hope expressed for more inclusive practices that would create opportunities for cross-cultural engagement.

> *"They organised among themselves only. But I feel they can also open up to the company* [sic] *like for other country workers to join in the celebration."* (Permanent resident, female, 38, Chinese)

One local participant emphasised the practical value of cross-residency relationships, noting that neighbours were the closest source of help in emergencies. She felt it was "very important" to "connect and to make friends" with her neighbours who were "all foreigners" as they were the closest people she could look to for help (Singaporean,

female, 50, Chinese). This pragmatic framing, grounded in mutual dependence rather than abstract ideals, was characteristic of how many participants approached community relations.

The symmetry of obligation was important to achieving consensus. Participants on both sides could see themselves being asked to contribute. Statements that placed disproportionate burden on one group, or that implied one group was more at fault for integration challenges, typically failed to achieve full agreement.

Representative consensus statements from the community life domain included:

- “I believe all residents should make efforts in learning and accepting each other in the country.” (100% can live with)
- “All residents should keep an open mind, as long as something is not unlawful or disrespectful, in order to build harmonious relations in the country.” (100% can live with)
- “Both locals and foreigners should make an effort to get to know each other and build cordial relationships in the community.” (100% can live with)
- “Both foreigners and locals must respect each other and make an effort to build a community.” (100% can live with)
- “In Singapore, we believe it takes strong collaboration between locals, foreigners and Government to make integration work.” (100% can live with)

The high consensus rate in this domain (77.8%) demonstrated that a foundation of shared values existed beneath the surface tensions that characterised public discourse on local-foreign relations. When participants were asked to endorse norms

rather than adjudicate claims, consensus proved readily achievable. This finding suggested that common ground on aspirational values was more accessible than public debate might indicate.

4.5 Jobs domain achieved moderate consensus through conditional formulations, with anxiety about being "second class" or "squeezed out" being pervasive across residency statuses

The jobs domain achieved a consensus rate of 22.2%, with four of 18 statements reaching full agreement. Employment elicited the most emotive narratives during the deliberations. Participants shared personal experiences of job loss, discrimination and uncertainty about their futures. Despite these vulnerabilities, participants across residency statuses found common ground when statements were formulated with appropriate conditionality.

The pattern of deliberation in this domain revealed a key mechanism for achieving consensus on distributive questions: conditional formulation. Broad statements of principle typically failed to achieve unanimity because participants could imagine scenarios where the principle would produce unfair outcomes. When statements specified the conditions under which they would apply, agreement became possible. The formulation "when qualifications are equal" or "all things being equal" proved particularly productive, as it allowed participants to affirm both citizen priority and meritocratic principles without forcing a choice between them.

Foreign participants endorsed citizen priority, framing it in terms of fairness and contribution

One of the most striking findings from the deliberations on jobs was foreign participants themselves endorsing citizen priority. This endorsement was framed in terms of fairness and contribution rather than birthright or exclusion.

> *"Singaporeans should get preferential treatment, because, I mean, they are the core of this country. They pay the most taxes, they are the most invested, and to treat them exactly the same as foreigners that could come from anywhere else. It's just not fair. Then why? What's the point of even calling yourself a citizen? What's the point of this being your country if you're going to get passed over for jobs, for literally anybody else?"* (Non-resident, female, 37, Caucasian)

This statement, notably from a non-resident rather than a citizen, illustrated a pattern observed throughout the deliberations: foreign participants endorsed citizen priority when it was framed in terms of reciprocity and fairness. The speaker reasoned from a universalisable principle: any country's citizens should have claims to priority in their own country, grounded in their contributions and obligations.

Local participants expressed similar sentiments, emphasising permanent stake and structural commitments that distinguished citizens from temporary residents.

> *"We are here to stay. This is our country. And ultimately, sorry to say, a lot of expats or foreigners come in here, and then you guys go back. You know, here, it's about earning money and go back… So a lot of times preferential access, because we survive here. We grow here; we live here. We call this our home."* (Singaporean, female, 43, Chinese)

The contrast between "here to stay" and "earning money and go back" captured a distinction that both local and foreign participants recognised as relevant to questions of priority. Citizens' claims rested on permanence, structural obligation and lack of exit

options. Foreign residents' situations were more varied, but many were perceived as retaining the option to leave if conditions became unfavourable.

Local participants expressed fears of being outpriced, overlooked, or rendered interchangeable

Among local participants, fears centred on being outpriced by foreign professionals, particularly at S Pass level, and on being overlooked for advancement in multinational firms where senior posts were filled by foreign nationals (E Pass) from the foreign country's headquarters.

Some participants described Singapore's economic model as "supercharged by cheap foreign labour" (Singaporean, male, 30, Chinese), suggesting that competitiveness was maintained through cost arbitrage rather than innovation or productivity gains. This framing positioned local workers as disadvantaged by a policy architecture that prioritised cost containment over local workforce development.

Others cited experiences suggesting systematic preference for foreign nationals in certain multinational firms.

> *"MNC with the CEO who is from their home ground. And [the company] says that, 'Oh, we can't find people to fill these jobs.' And then naturally [those eventually hired are] going to be from their headquarters."* (Singaporean, female, 61, Chinese)

This observation pointed to a specific mechanism of disadvantage: when hiring decisions were made by foreign executives, network effects and implicit biases might favour candidates from the executives' home countries. The claim that locals could not

be found for senior roles might become self-fulfilling if search processes systematically overlooked local candidates.

There was also a perception that Singaporeans bore heavier structural costs, such as CPF contributions, but were sometimes judged less favourably than foreign candidates who did not carry these costs. This perception persisted despite Employment Pass and S Pass qualifying salaries being benchmarked against local gross wages inclusive of employer CPF contributions (Ministry of Manpower, 2025). One participant drew an analogy to hawker food prices and the carpentry industry to illustrate competitive pressures.

> *"I think pre-COVID we will not accept a $6* char siew fan*. Increasingly, we are doing that already, right? Nobody is criticising the hawkers, yeah. So we may be moving there, but we need to move there a lot faster. But the alternative is we lose our entire carpentry industry to the Malaysians."*
> (Singaporean, male, 56, Chinese)

The underlying concern was that Singaporeans would be unable to compete on cost with foreign workers who faced lower living expenses or had lower wage expectations. Without differentiation on quality or capability, price competition would disadvantage locals.

The fear of becoming "second class" in one's own country emerged repeatedly in the deliberations. This concern went beyond economic competition to encompass status and recognition.

> *"[the current foreign worker policy] will make the [younger generations of Singaporeans] feel that they are second class. They are second class residents… you treat me like a second class, so they will start to migrate somewhere else."* (Singaporean, female, 50, Chinese)

This statement introduced a dynamic consequence: if young Singaporeans felt devalued, they might exercise their own exit option through emigration, weakening the citizen core that integration policy was meant to serve.

Related to this was a strong view that integration should complement rather than displace the local workforce.

> *"I always strongly feel that you bringing immigrants, they are supposed to support and be part of our workforce, not to overtake it or to overrun it."* (Singaporean, male, 64, Eurasian)

Foreign participants described feeling permanently temporary despite long-term residence

Foreign professionals were often discussed as permanently temporary: globally mobile talent who could be welcomed for their skills yet never fully regarded as members of the community. This framing created its own form of precarity.

> *"I'm a foreigner. I've been here 10 years [sic]. It's not that I don't want to become a PR, it's that I find it near impossible to become a PR."* (Non-resident, male, 41, Pakistani)

He further elaborated that this was the same case for many other non-locals he knew, where the "kids have become adults living in Singapore, but they cannot become PRs."

Hence, he felt that to label this group of long-staying non-locals as transient was unfair to them.

This observation complicated the binary between permanent citizens and transient foreigners. Some foreign residents had lived in Singapore for a decade or more, raised children in Singapore schools and built professional networks and community ties. Their children had grown up Singaporean in all respects except legal status. For these residents, the characterisation of foreigners as temporary did not match their lived reality or their intentions.

The tension between integration expectations and belonging pathways emerged as a significant stress point. Foreign residents were encouraged to integrate, but pathways to permanent status remained discretionary and opaque. The relationship between what was asked of foreign residents and what was offered in return surfaced as a source of unresolved tension.

Consensus statements distinguished between hiring preference and career progression

Despite these tensions, participants found common ground by distinguishing between access to jobs and progression within them. The consensus that emerged held that citizens should receive preference at point of hire when qualifications were equal, but that career progression should be based on performance and merit regardless of nationality.

Participants generally agreed that foreigners contributed to Singapore's economic progress and that the country needed to remain open, though with calibrated policies.

> *"Singapore must remain open with evolving criteria of immigration to continue its economic growth…. I mentioned evolving criteria of immigration because the needs of today are not the same as tomorrow."* (Non-resident, male, 41 Pakistani)

On hiring, the principle of citizen priority when qualifications were equal achieved broad endorsement.

> *"… if an expat, a foreign professional and Singaporean has the same qualifications, then there's no choosing. It's a Singaporean you should hire."* (Singaporean, female, 77, Chinese)

A non-resident participant endorsed this principle while emphasising the qualification threshold.

> *"I wouldn't give someone preferential treatment if they don't meet the standards.... If they meet the qualifications, I have no problem giving preferential treatment because that's kind of, it's Singapore."* (Non-resident, female, 23, Indian)

On career progression, participants across residency statuses agreed that advancement should reflect performance rather than nationality.

> *"I think career progression should be equal, regardless of what nationality…. I position myself if I were to get promoted, I do not want to*

feel that I'm promoted just because I'm a local." (Singaporean, female, 36, Malay)

Participants acknowledged that foreign professionals had a legitimate role where they brought skills that Singaporeans currently lacked.

"I still need the help of a foreign professional. We still need these skills or mentorship or directions from these foreign professionals. Then once they are [here], we work [hand] in hand to achieve [economic growth]." (Singaporean, female, 50, Chinese)

However, participants also endorsed expectations for skills transfer and eventual localisation.

"I believe we should work towards building a framework of passing down skills and training Singaporeans on and an exit plan for E-pass holders [sic]." (Singaporean, female, 60, Indian)

The concern was that foreign hiring should be transitional rather than permanent, with explicit mechanisms to develop local capability.

"How do we make sure that Singaporeans have the skills or the skill transfer to ensure that then we are being able to take certain jobs? And not like a continuous excuse of we just don't have enough skills for this kind of industry." (Singaporean, female, 36, Malay)

A non-resident participant articulated a formulation that captured this balance and achieved consensus.

> *"… career progression must be based solely on individual performance and not on demographics… while investing in the career development of Singaporeans… with the aim of localising the job position."* (Non-resident, female, 37, Caucasian)

Representative consensus statements from the jobs domain included:

- "Foreign professionals may be hired but Singapore[ans] would be considered first for jobs. And best person for career progression." (100% can live with)
- "Singaporeans must be given preferential treatment only if and only when they meet the required skillset or competencies for hiring." (100% can live with)
- "Singaporeans have the strength and adaptability to foster working relationships with the foreign professionals to contribute to Singapore's economic growth." (100% can live with)
- "Checks, balances and strong prosecution as mandated by the government must be in place on companies with respect to hiring practices." (100% can live with)

The jobs domain achieved only 4 consensus statements from the 18 large-group deliberation statements (22.2%). Many statements that achieved small-group consensus failed in the large group because precise wording could not be agreed upon. The word "preferential" proved particularly contentious, with some participants finding it implied entitlement without effort. This semantic sensitivity illustrated the

importance of language in deliberative contexts: substantively similar positions might achieve or fail consensus depending on the specific words used to express them.

4.6 Education achieved consensus on citizen priority within common standards, though debates over "birthright" versus merit and foreign scholarships proved contentious

The education domain achieved a consensus rate of 25.0%, with four of 16 statements reaching full agreement. Education was another high-intensity domain, especially around university places and scholarships. The deliberations revealed deep divides on fundamental questions about meritocracy, citizenship and the purpose of public education.

Participants debated whether university access was a birthright of citizenship or should remain strictly merit-based

One camp argued that access to subsidised local university education was a core expression of citizenship. The education system should be expanded to ensure that every Singaporean child had access to subsidised university education, including those with non-academic strengths. One local participant expressed this strongly.

> *"I think it's a birthright of Singaporeans to be given [university education]. Not even by merit, it should be a given birthright for them to get as far as they can!"* (Singaporean, female, 60, Indian)

The "birthright" framing positioned university access as an entitlement of citizenship. On this view, the state had an obligation to provide educational pathways for all citizens to have the greatest possibility of university admission, regardless of academic route.

Another camp insisted that while citizens should have priority once standards were met, competitive entry must remain merit-based to maintain the quality and reputation of Singapore's universities.

> *"… the principle of meritocracy means also based on university standards, academic qualifications, all things being equal, in the mandate [locals] should be given that priority for home based local institutions [sic]."* (Singaporean, female, 43, Chinese)

This position sought to preserve both citizen priority and meritocratic standards. The key qualifier was "all things being equal": citizens should receive priority among equally qualified candidates, but qualification thresholds should not be lowered for citizens.

One participant argued that competition with foreign talent had been personally beneficial.

> *"… compete as hard as possible because of foreign talent was a good thing because [he] landed up with even better outcomes… [so he disagrees that Singaporeans] should be given priority [in local institutions] if we are not that good."* (Singaporean, male, 30, Chinese)

This pro-competition view was a minority position but illustrated that local participants did not uniformly favour citizen preference. Some valued the competitive pressure that foreign students brought and worried that excessive protection would reduce Singaporeans' incentive to excel.

Foreign scholarships generated significant discomfort among local participants

There was strong discomfort with publicly funded undergraduate scholarships for foreigners who might not stay in Singapore to contribute after graduation. Participants questioned whether 18-year-olds could meaningfully commit to long-term contribution and whether such awards should be accorded with Singaporean taxpayer subsidy.

> *"At 18 years old, you really don't have the capability of making that kind of lifelong decision that you want to give up your citizenship and actually become a Singaporean… do they really have the commitment to stay in Singapore after they graduate? I don't think so, at that young age… it shouldn't be on Singapore's money that these people are coming in to study; we are the taxpayers."* (Singaporean, female, 60, Indian)

The concern was that foreign scholarship recipients received a subsidised education funded by Singaporean taxpayers but some of them may not remain and contribute to Singapore after graduation. The bond period attached to some scholarships was seen as insufficient guarantee of long-term commitment.

Some supported a small, capped pool for meritorious foreign students paying full fees.

> *"My belief is that universities are funded by Singapore taxpayers and their primary purpose should be to help educate the future workforce of Singapore. There is a place for foreigners at a small level." (PR, 60, Male, Causasian)*

> *"… some competition is really good but on the other hand, it must be fully paid by the foreigner and not by scholarship."* (Singaporean, female, 60, Indian)

This position accepted international diversity as educationally valuable but drew the line at public subsidy. Foreigners were welcome to study in Singapore if they paid their own way.

Others resisted any language resembling quotas, drawing parallels with contentious practices in other countries.

> *"We don't want to end up like a situation in Malaysia where there is a quota for Muslims."* (Singaporean, female, 77, Chinese)

The reference to ethnic quotas in Malaysian universities illustrated sensitivity to any policy that might formalise group-based allocation of educational places. Participants wanted citizen priority but were wary of rigid quota systems.

Consensus was achieved through conditional formulations that preserved both meritocracy and citizen priority

Consensus was achieved on statements that preserved both meritocratic principles and citizen priority. The key formulation was "when their qualifications are equal" or "when admission requirements are met", which allowed participants to endorse citizen priority without abandoning merit-based selection.

> *"As long as they fulfil the requirements, Singaporeans should go in first. After that, then others."* (Singaporean, female, 77, Chinese)

At the same time, there was shared support for maintaining international diversity provided citizen access remained robust.

> *"… our local education institutions know and should continue to ensure strong opportunities for Singaporeans, while remaining open and*

> *welcoming to global talent that enrich our academic community."* (Singaporean, female, 43, Chinese)

A non-resident participant endorsed the value of international exposure while affirming merit as the basis for access.

> *"… exposure from outside will definitely help the [local] students… [non-locals] should be given access no doubt but should be based on merit."* (Foreigner, male, 40, Indian)

Several participants favoured capping scholarships for foreigners, through proposals like "no more than 10% of [university admissions for foreigners] should offer large scholarships" (permanent resident, male, 60, Caucasian). However, any element of quotas or caps was rejected, and did not achieve consensus.

Representative consensus statements from the education domain included:

- "I believe every Singapore child should be given ample opportunities to excel." (100% can live with)
- "Singaporeans should be given priority, within their abilities, local schools and universities, even as we uphold the principle of meritocracy with instruments of means testing." (100% can live with)
- "While upholding meritocracy, our local education institutions will and should continue to ensure strong opportunities for Singaporeans while remaining open and welcoming to global talent that enrich our academic community." (100% can live with)

- "In line with our meritocratic principles, our education institutes strive to provide accessible pathways for Singaporeans, while valuing the diversity and perspectives brought by international students." (100% can live with)

Several statements came close to consensus but fell short of the 100% threshold (see Appendix E).

4.7 Multiculturalism achieved only one consensus statement, with participants expressing anxiety about cultural change and the boundaries of belonging

The multiculturalism domain achieved the lowest consensus rate at 6.7%, with only one of 15 statements reaching full agreement. The most difficult and least resolved discussions concerned identity and cultural change. Seven statements that came close were recorded as "near consensus", explicitly noted by participants in their 48-page Residents' Report as statements they could not fully agree on but wished to document.

The low consensus rate in this domain carried theoretical and policy significance. While the other three domains addressed questions that could be resolved through conditional formulations and precise boundary-drawing, the multiculturalism domain touched on fundamental questions about identity and belonging that might not admit such resolution. The deliberative literature has long recognised that identity-based conflicts differ qualitatively from interest-based ones (Dryzek, 2005). The IPS-REACH Consensus Conference data provided empirical evidence for this distinction.

Participants reaffirmed multiculturalism but struggled to articulate how it should evolve

Participants reaffirmed multiculturalism as a defining feature of Singapore but struggled to articulate how it was changing or should change as the foreign population grew. Two statements that both received nods of agreement in the room illustrated the fundamental tension.

> *"… we need to realise and accept [that Singapore's multicultural reality will change even without foreigners] and don't blame the foreigners."* (Permanent resident, male, 67, Chinese)

Another participant took a different view, suggesting that foreigners must adapt to an already-settled culture.

> *"Because there is a settled population and after 60 years of independence, there is a settled agreement on what this culture is Singapore [sic]. So as a foreigner coming in, either you subscribe to it, or don't come."* (Singaporean, male, 64, Eurasian)

These two statements captured a fundamental tension that the deliberations surfaced but could not resolve. The first suggested that change was inevitable and should not be attributed to foreigners specifically. The second suggested that Singapore's culture was already settled and that newcomers must adapt to it rather than expecting accommodation. Both positions found support from different camps, yet they pointed in different directions on whether Singapore's cultural identity was fixed or evolving.

Some participants expressed a sense that the social compact had changed without consent

Some locals feared that without shared institutions such as National Service or common schooling experience, a growing foreign presence could thin out the sense of "we", leaving patchworks of parallel communities rather than an integrated society. Foreigners and PRs spoke of feeling permanently on trial, uncertain whether full belonging would ever be achievable regardless of their contributions.

Several participants worried that if multiculturalism was treated as ambient rather than actively nurtured, fault lines related to country of origin and socio-economic status could harden over time.

> *"… openness is valuable, but cohesion does not happen automatically. Yeah, so it only takes intentional policies, integration support, and shared norms in order to make this happen."* (Singaporean, female, 43, Chinese)

One participant expressed a sense that the social compact had changed without adequate consultation, leaving citizens to adapt to a new reality they had not chosen.

> *"... racial harmony is in our pledge, right? But along the way, I felt that my social contract changed with the government…. I now need to accept foreigners as part of my living reality. And it became like a covert implicit contract. Like because I'm a Singaporean, I need to accept it…. So maybe some of my measures would be, talking about it, instituting it as part of a shared value taught in primary school."* (Singaporean, male, 30, Chinese)

This observation distinguished between the original multicultural compact among the founding races (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others) and the newer diversity resulting from immigration. The participant experienced the extension of multiculturalism to include foreigners as an unannounced change to the terms of citizenship, a "covert implicit contract" that had not been explicitly negotiated.

Unlike jobs and education, where participants could discuss and propose policy adjustments, identity and multiculturalism were widely seen as domains requiring long-term social, civic and cultural work rather than policy shifts or tweaks. Participants drew parallels with the deliberate effort invested in managing race and religious relations among the founding communities, suggesting that similar intentional effort would be needed to integrate newer arrivals.

> *"... it takes effort to know one another [among Singaporeans]. Because all our culture, background are all different, from different level, different culture, different races [sic]. We have to respect one another. And it takes as much effort for the locals to get to know a foreigner. Just like similar efforts has taken to know a different race. Chinese and Malay, Malay and Indian, whatsoever. So just take a foreign identity as one of the new cultures or races…. As long as you're willing to give. Relationship and social cohesiveness are all about give and take."* (Singaporean, male, 64, Chinese)

This reframing was significant. By suggesting that foreigners could be understood as "one of the new cultures or races", the participant extended the logic of Singapore's founding multicultural framework to encompass immigration-driven diversity. If this is

to be realised, integration with foreigners would require the same deliberate effort that had been invested in managing race and religion relations.

The single consensus statement balanced acceptance with maintenance of identity

Only one statement achieved 100% consensus in the multiculturalism domain:

- "SG residents should accept and understand people of different nationalities without losing who we are, and foreigners must respect the host country." (100% can live with)

This statement succeeded where others failed because it balanced multiple concerns. It called for acceptance and understanding of diversity ("accept and understand people of different nationalities") while also affirming the importance of maintaining existing identity ("without losing who we are"). It imposed an obligation on foreigners ("must respect the host country") as well as on residents, maintaining the symmetry that characterised successful consensus statements in other domains.

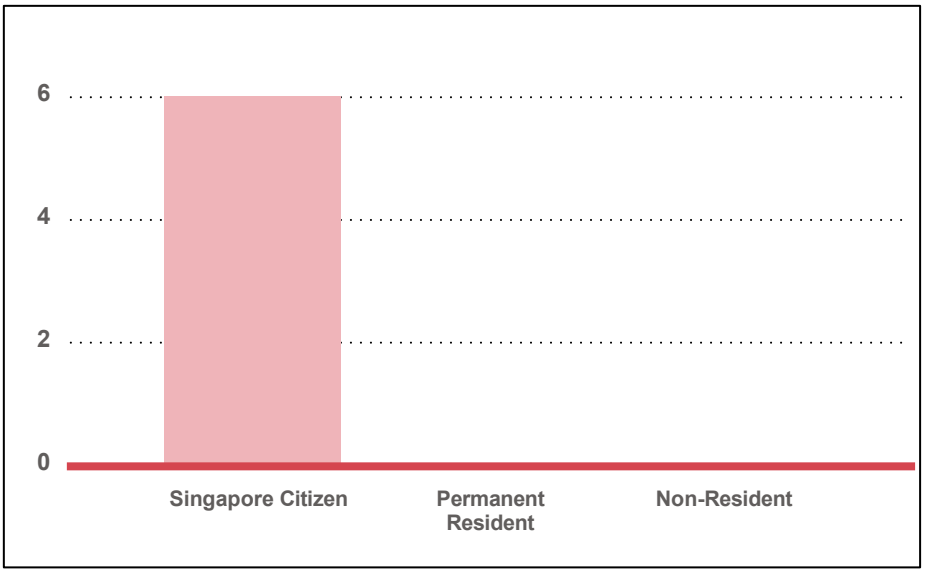
The low consensus rate (6.7%) in the multiculturalism domain, compared to community life (77.8%), jobs (22.2%) and education (25.0%), provided significant empirical evidence: that identity questions are qualitatively more resistant to deliberative resolution than distributive questions. The pattern suggested that deliberation worked well for calibrating resource allocation and establishing norms of behaviour; however, it encountered limits when fundamental questions of belonging and cultural change were at stake.

4.8 Pre-post surveys indicated that deliberation increased perspective-taking and intellectual humility, with citizens showing the largest shifts

Pre-deliberation and post-deliberation surveys were administered to all 24 participants to examine how attitudes and perceptions shifted through the deliberation process. Within-participant shifts were calculated by comparing post-deliberation scores to pre-deliberation baseline scores. A positive shift indicated strengthening of position, while a negative shift indicated softening or recalibration. While the sample was small and non-representative, the results provided insight into the effects of deliberation on participant attitudes.

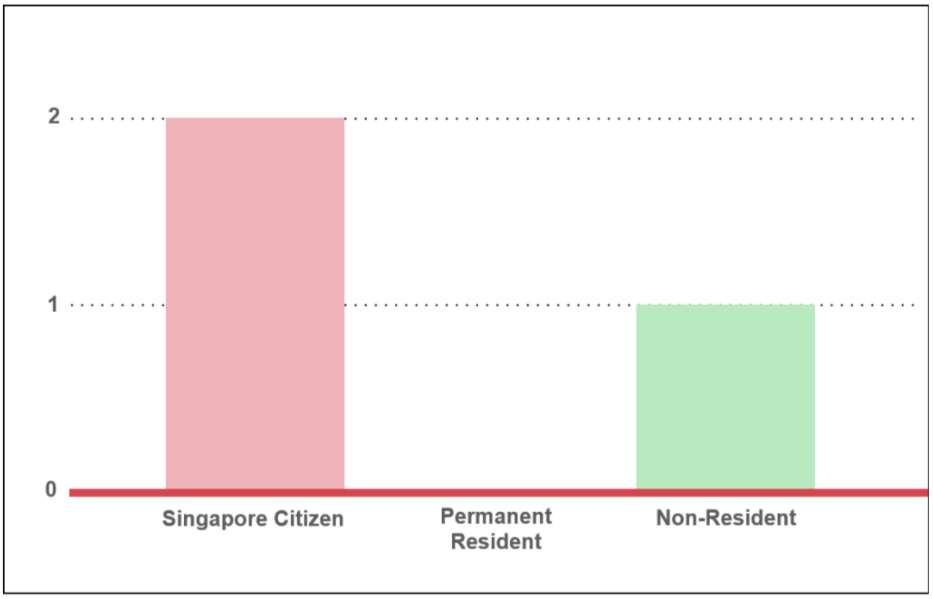
Deliberation increased perspective-taking and readiness to engage across differences

Figure 26. "I am comfortable engaging with people whose backgrounds or perspectives differ from mine."
(Pre-Post Survey Shift by residency status)



The above survey question investigated participants' comfort engaging with people whose backgrounds or perspectives differed from their own. When analysed by residency status, Singapore citizens showed the highest cumulative positive shift, indicating significant movement from their baseline.

Figure 27. "I value different perspectives from others even when I disagree with them." (Pre-Post Survey Shift by residency status)

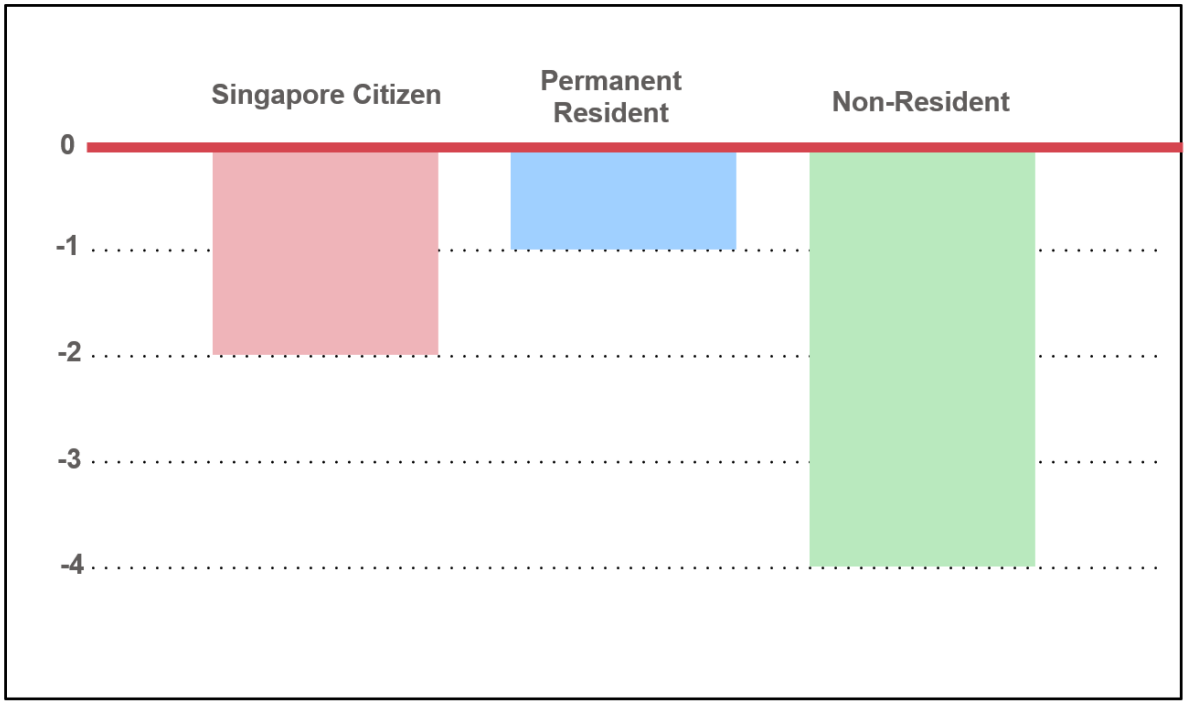


When considered together with the earlier question, which asked whether participants valued different perspectives even when disagreeing, citizen participants again showed the greatest positive increment post-conference.

These results suggested that the Consensus Conference had a positive effect on bridging social capital formation. Citizen participants appeared to particularly value the opportunity for engagement with and understanding of non-citizens. The deliberative encounter seemed to provide something that everyday neighbourhood interactions had not.

All residency groups showed greater intellectual humility after engaging with diverse viewpoints

Figure 28. "How sure are you that your views relating to local-foreign integration are correct, given that others may not share your views?"
(Survey Pre-Post Shift by residency status)



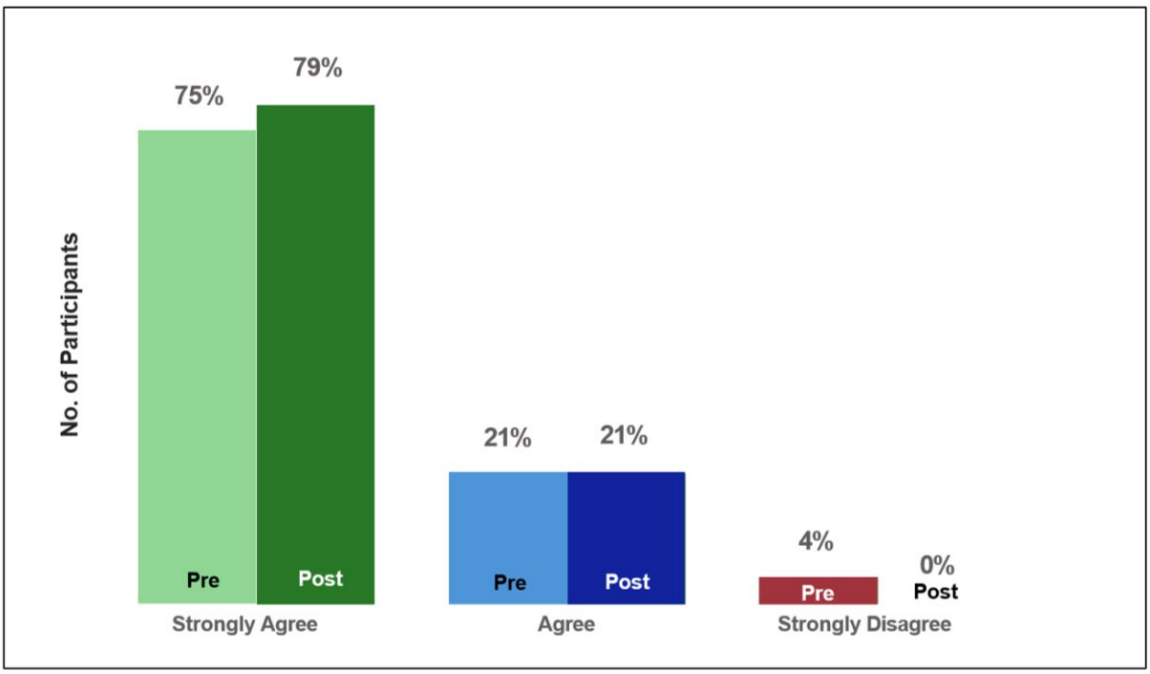
This question inquired how assured participants felt that their views on local-foreign integration were correct. Comparing pre-deliberation to post-deliberation responses showed that several participants registered decreases in certainty. When analysed by residency status, all participant groups showed greater intellectual humility after engaging with diverse viewpoints. Non-resident participants reported the highest downward shift, possibly signalling recalibration as they encountered perspectives from locals they had not previously understood.

This finding was consistent with research on deliberation and perspective-taking. Encountering reasoned disagreement from people with different life circumstances

can prompt reconsideration of one's own certainty. Notably, the reduction in certainty was not experienced by participants as failure. Post-session feedback indicated that many valued the exposure to different viewpoints even when it complicated their own positions.

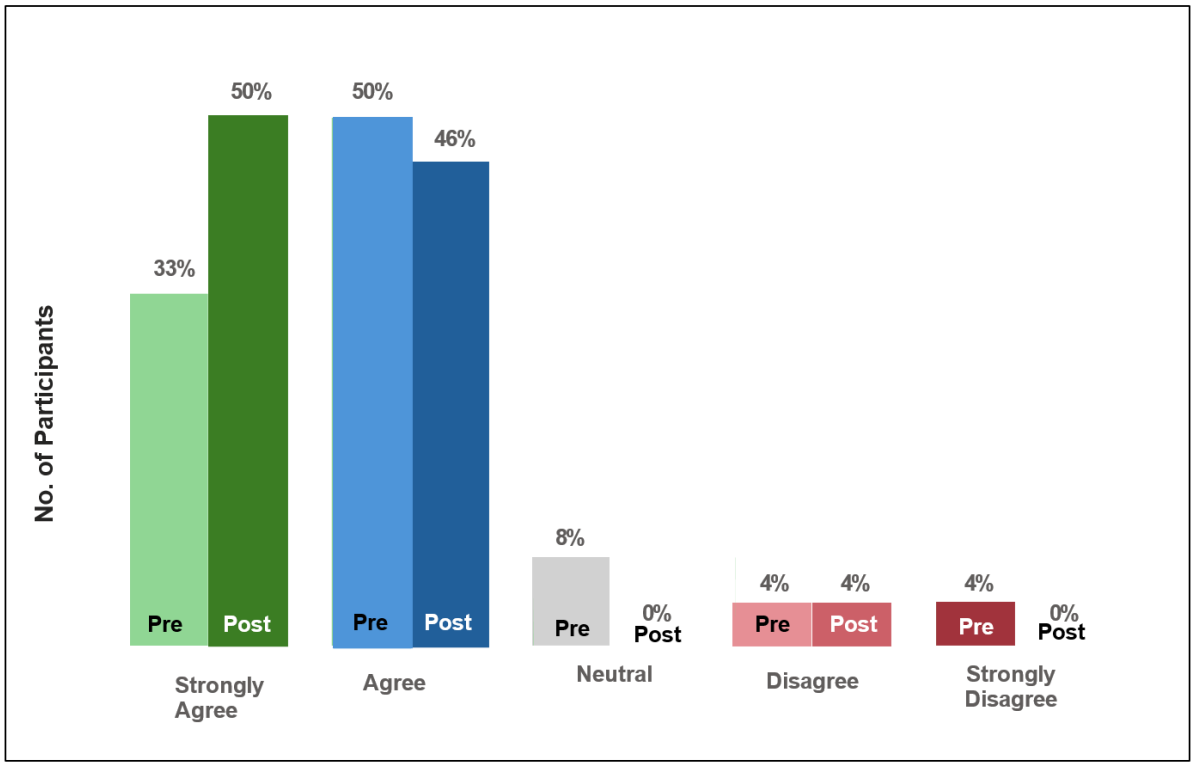
Everyday respect and mutual effort enjoyed strong normative consensus

Figure 29. "Everyone living in Singapore (whether local or foreign) should treat each other with respect and consideration in everyday life and in shared spaces."
(Participants' Pre-Post Survey Results)



This survey question tested attitudes towards treating each other with respect and consideration in everyday life and shared spaces. This question already scored high pre-deliberation, with over 90% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing. This position gained ground and remained stable post-deliberation.

Figure 30. "Both locals and foreigners should make equal effort in getting to know each other and build deep relationships in the community."
(Participants' Pre-Post Survey Results)



Similarly, when asked whether both locals and foreigners should make equal effort to get to know each other, results showed a high baseline (83% agreeing or strongly agreeing) which strengthened post-deliberation (96% agreeing or strongly agreeing). These scores indicated a strong normative bedrock for civility and mutual effort that transcended residency status.

After the Consensus Conference, participants felt that government was more likely to consider their views, and reported stronger civic efficacy

Figure 31. "Citizens in Singapore have a say about what the government does."
(Pre-Post Survey Shift by residency status)

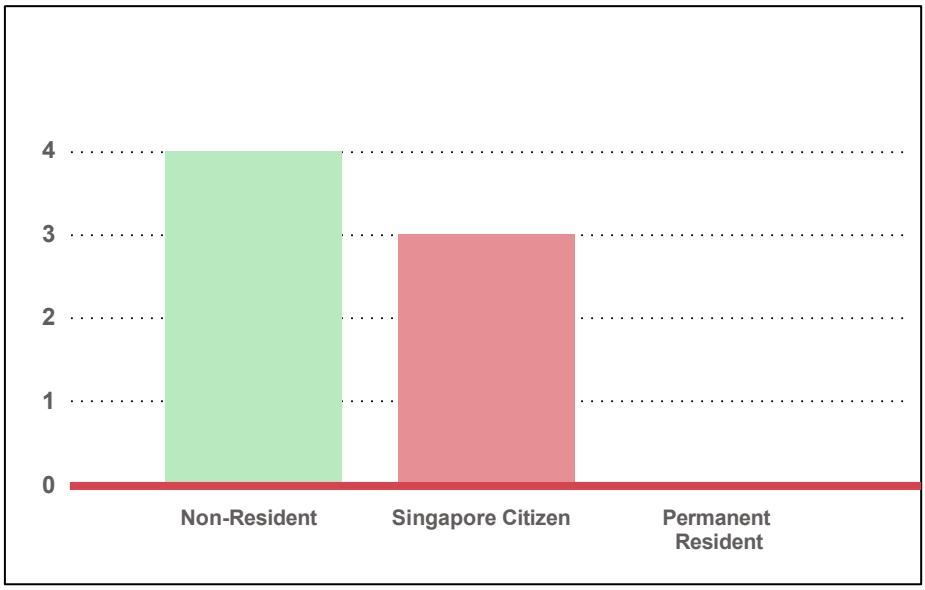
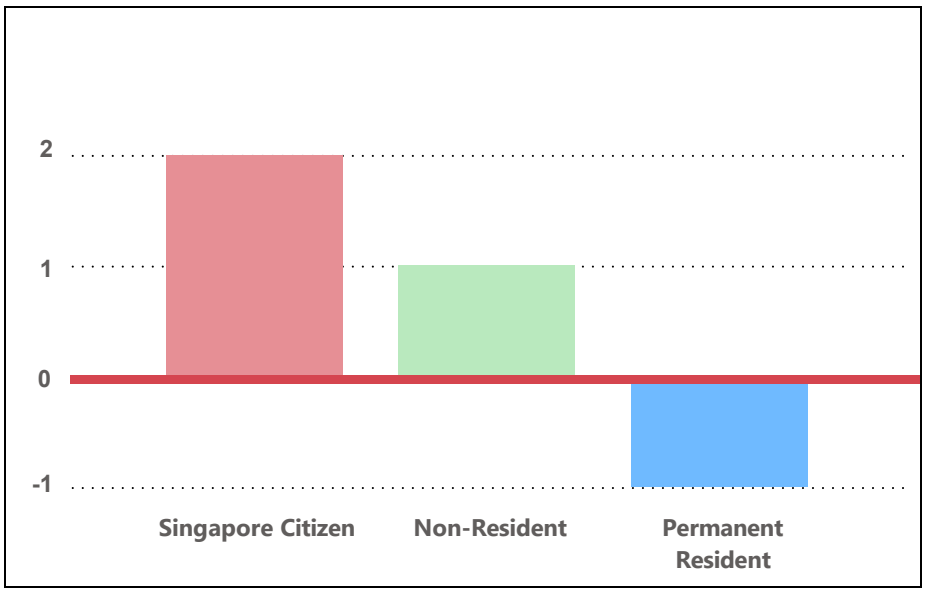


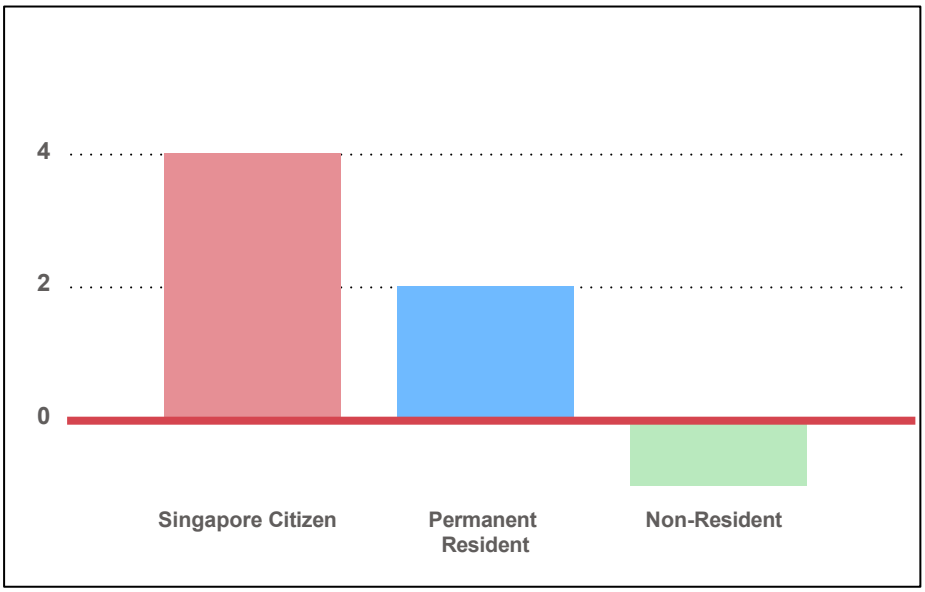
Figure 32. "The Singapore government cares about what citizens think."
(Pre-Post Survey Shift by residency status)



Following the Consensus Conference, both Singapore citizens and non-resident participants showed increased agreement that citizens in Singapore have a say in what the government does. Non-resident participants registered the highest cumulative shift, suggesting that the deliberative experience enhanced their sense of voice in Singapore's civic processes.

A similar positive movement was observed regarding whether the Singapore government cares about what citizens think. These shifts indicated that participants developed more trust in government responsiveness after the Consensus Conference, possibly reflecting the engagement of government partners such as REACH and PA in the process.

Figure 33. "Someone like me can contribute to making decisions in my community." (Pre-Post Survey Shift by residency status)



On this survey question, which asked whether someone like the participant could contribute to community decisions, citizen participants registered a slight positive shift while non-resident participants showed a slight decline. The latter pattern could be

interpreted alongside the intellectual humility finding that non-residents' increased recognition of complexity may have tempered their initial confidence about their own capacity to contribute.

In sum, the quantitative findings suggested that the Consensus Conference was successful in widening perspective-taking, strengthening reciprocity norms and lifting civic efficacy for participants. These shifts were consistent with bridging social capital formation, though the small sample size and self-selected participants warrant caution in generalisation.

4.9 Participants practised accountability and reciprocity in deliberation, with emotions and narratives treated as valid inputs

The consensus achieved was meaningful only if the deliberation that produced it met standards of quality. If participants had simply deferred to dominant voices or suppressed their real views to achieve apparent agreement, the consensus would lack legitimacy. Evidence from the deliberative sessions suggested that participants engaged substantively with one another's positions.

Participants regularly challenged one another's assumptions

Participants regularly challenged one another's assumptions, querying terms such as "all", "priority", "quota", "grant", "best efforts" and "foreigner". They asked each other to clarify what problem a proposed statement was trying to solve, whether a formulation might have unintended consequences, and whether generalisations were supported by their own experiences.

At the same time, they practised reciprocity: building on others' ideas rather than treating each contribution as zero-sum, acknowledging points of agreement before raising objections, and offering alternative wording that preserved core concerns while addressing objections.

Facilitators reinforced that no one was obliged to agree. Statements that failed to reach 100% support were explicitly labelled as "no-go" rather than softened into vague compromise. This protected minority views from being masked by majoritarian language.

Emotions and narrative were treated as valid inputs to public reason

Consistent with Young's (2000) argument that deliberation should include narrative and testimony alongside argument, the process treated emotion and narrative as valid inputs to public reasoning. Participants shared experiences of losing out on jobs, feeling excluded in their own country or struggling to integrate despite genuine effort. Such narratives surfaced fear, resentment and shame, but did not end the conversation. Instead, they often prompted others to restate what they had heard, test their own assumptions, or reconsider blanket judgments about locals or foreigners.

The following vignette illustrated the trust built through deliberation during a segment of the conversation, allowing participants to voice discomfort over perceived unfair hiring practices.

[(Permanent resident, male, 60, Caucasian) expressed strong concern about "unfair hiring practices" limiting job access to residents)]

[In response] (Singaporean, female, 46, Chinese): *"… if foreign investments come to Singapore, and they hire their own people of course as locals we feel discomfort."*

(Non-resident, male, 41, Pakistani): "*There's policy, and there's how it gets implemented. Yeah, because at a personal level, it's a very different feeling. And lived reality is also different. In where I work, it would be impossible to do what Participant A has said [referencing the COMPASS point system]. So that has happened, and companies have been forced to hire alternative nationalities, make alternative arrangements for employment."*

(Singaporean, female, 46, Chinese): "*So the policy's had [effect on the banks]."*

(Singaporean, female, 61, Chinese): *"I think, Participant A, in the ideal world I agree with the idea. The government has to come up with a policy to take care [of the locals].... We're helping the government to try and protect the locals. And unfortunately, I mean, when you have a policy, then the policy will go kind of like sometimes one way and become too protective."*

This exchange illustrated how participants engaged with contentious topics while maintaining mutual respect. Disagreements were acknowledged and explored rather than avoided.

Stereotypes were challenged and sometimes softened through deliberative exchange

A revealing exchange occurred when a non-Singaporean participant voiced concern that citizen preference would create complacency.

> *"The reason for my disagreement is that this statement will create complacency… because I've seen in other countries where this specific group of people gets protected, and that breeds laziness. Sorry for that word, but that's what's happening if we allow that."* (Permanent resident, male, 67, Chinese)

In the discussion that followed, two Singaporean participants (male, 58, Chinese; and male, 56, Chinese) shared their hiring experiences noting perceptions that Singaporeans quit more easily when facing hard work or criticism. This was countered by another participant (Singaporean, female, 43, Chinese) who noted, "fundamentally it boils down to attitude and aptitude, right? So whether or not they are not entitled, whether they are progressive or not, it boils down to the individual." This appeared to soften the stereotype about local complacency.

Another participant shared concrete hiring experience:

> *"… when I was hiring people, we always give locals the first consideration, not because it's cheaper. We, you know, at MNCs, we care less about money. We care about performance. Yep, we pay for performance. So if we find a local that can do the job, that's it. Forget it, because we can find someone who's better because they understand the local context, much, much more compared to expatriate. Alright, I mean, this makes perfect sense to hire locals. We don't pay — 'we' meaning the multinationals — we don't pay extra for nothing. Just want to clarify."* (Singaporean, male, 58, Chinese)

This exchange exemplified what Gutmann and Thompson (1996) call an "economy of moral disagreement": participants engaged the substance of each other's claims, offered reciprocally justifiable reasons (including appeals to lived experience), and modified assumptions so as to reduce grounds for reasonable rejection while retaining their core commitments.

Perceived legitimacy of opposing views increased

Table 2. Legitimacy, Feasibility and Future Engagement (5-point scale)

Question	Pre-CC	Post CC
I believe the common ground statements developed are likely to be supported by residents in my community.	-	4.13
I believe the common ground statements are useful as guiding principles of action in the community.	-	4.29
After my Consensus Conference experience, I will likely participate in future citizen engagement opportunities.	-	4.38
I would recommend other people to take part in future Consensus Conferences.	-	4.42

Participants generally viewed the outputs of the Consensus Conference as legitimate and actionable, and expressed strong willingness to remain engaged in future participatory processes. Participants also reported strong openness to future engagement. These findings point to sustained trust in the process beyond the immediate study context. The high mean scores (4.29–4.42) reinforce this interpretation.

Qualitative evidence also suggested that perceived legitimacy of opposing views increased through deliberation. Participants who began with strong positions expressed more nuanced perspectives after hearing others' constraints.

> *"[All workers] contribute to Singapore['s economic growth]. But Singaporeans must still be given priority access to jobs. I don't know how I'm going to tweak [the statement] because they currently aren't. The only way I can think of is Singaporeans… to be given preferential access*

to jobs, the HR of the respective companies must be a Singaporean."

(Singaporean, male, 64, Eurasian)

This statement illustrated maintenance of core position while grappling with implementation complexity. Some stereotypes were softened through exchange. The ideas that foreigners were uniformly self-interested, or that locals were broadly entitled, were questioned in light of lived examples.

4.10 Participants collaborated across residency lines to develop a community ground-up integration project that continued beyond the formal sessions

H2 predicted that despite differing residency statuses and perspectives, participants could come together to co-create a community project in service of local-foreign integration. The evidence provided preliminary support for this hypothesis.

The community heritage trail project emerged through participant brainstorming and collective decision-making

During Session 3, 16 participants (the remaining eight were concurrently working on the Residents' Report) engaged in an Open Space Technology process to brainstorm community initiatives. Participants responded to prompting questions: How might locals and foreigners find like-minded neighbours and friends? How might locals and foreigners give back to the community together?

Following individual brainstorming, participants pitched ideas and voted using dot-voting. The group selected a heritage trail initiative, "Triad Trails / Food Heritage Trails" as their top community project.

Project purpose and design

The project aimed to foster local-foreign integration in Changi Simei and East Coast GRC, deepen understanding of Singapore's history and cultural practices, and promote social cohesion through shared experiences. The proposed format was a one-day heritage trail after Chinese New Year 2026 linking significant yet under explored local sites with food and cultural dimensions.

Distinctive features

The project included ex-offenders as tour guides sharing lived experiences, connecting integration across the local-foreign divide to integration across other social divides. Community volunteers would handle research, facilitation, administration, and liaison. The design reflected participants' interest in creating cross-cutting ties that would link local-foreign integration to broader community-building.

The working group comprised participants from different residency statuses who continued collaborating

The initial working group comprised seven Singapore citizens and three foreigners. This cross-residency composition was itself evidence for H2: participants from different residency statuses chose to continue working together after the structured sessions ended.

Institutional engagement

The project group submitted a detailed proposal to the People's Association and requested funding. Adviser Jessica Tan indicated support with caveats, asking the team to expand participation numbers and explore a trail in East Coast. The project was subsequently considered by REACH and the Singapore Government Partnerships Office for broader support.

Ongoing collaboration

The project group formed a WhatsApp coordination group and began work towards operationalisation. Additional participants joined the working group after the Consensus Conference, and they organised a virtual meeting on the Zoom platform. If the pilot succeeded, the group intended to run trails quarterly and explore partnerships with educational institutions and corporates via CSR programmes.

Participants co-authored 48-page Residents' Report with extensive revision

The participants co-authored a 48-page Residents' Report documenting their consensus statements, no-go zones and reflections on the process. The report underwent more than 80 revisions as participants edited one another's contributions and refined the eventual report. This joint authorship across residency demonstrated collaborative capacity that extended beyond the project itself.

The report was presented to the REACH chairman (Senior Minister of State Tan Kiat How) and the grassroots adviser (Ms Jessica Tan), providing a participant-authored account of the deliberations. The co-authorship process required participants to

negotiate language and framing across different perspectives, itself an exercise in deliberative practice.

This evidence provided preliminary support for H2. Participants came together across residency statuses to co-create a community project, and collaboration persisted beyond the Consensus Conference. Full confirmation of H2 will need to await successful implementation of the community ground-up trail.

4.11 Over nine in 10 participants reported a positive overall experience, with facilitation a key element

Figure 34. "Overall, I had a positive experience participating in the Consensus Conference." (Participants' Post Survey Results)

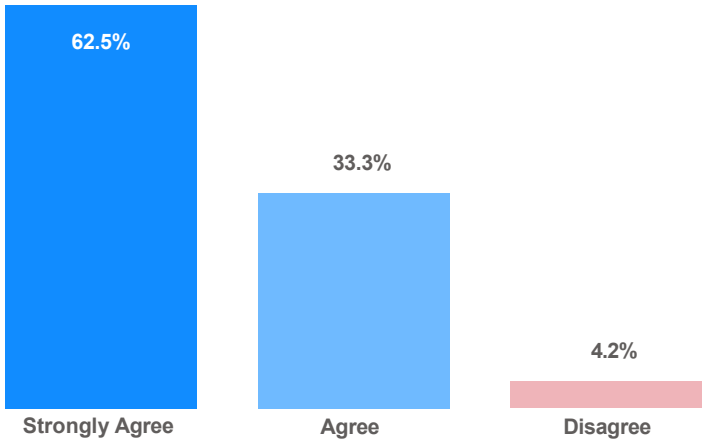


Table 3. Overall Experience (5-point scale)

Question	Pre-CC	Post CC
Overall, I had a positive experience participating in the Consensus Conference.	-	4.54
Overall, I feel that the Consensus Conference was a meaningful experience for me.	-	4.46
Overall, I feel that the Consensus Conference was an empowering experience for me.	-	4.42
Based on my experience, the Consensus Conference can be replicated in other constituencies, communities or topics.	-	4.38

The overall evaluations of the CC were overwhelmingly positive as outlined in the table above. Participants thought that the process was empowering and believed the model could be replicated across other constituencies, communities, or topics. Mean scores above 4.3 across these items further substantiate the strength of these assessments.

Table 4. Procedure and Facilitation (5-point scale)

Question	Pre-CC	Post CC
During the Consensus Conference, there were enough opportunities for me to express my views.	-	4.46
Fellow participants gave fair consideration to my views.	-	4.33
I could share my views without fear of judgment or pressure to conform.	-	4.42
The facilitators were helpful in ensuring a safe space for me to share my views openly.	-	4.58
Facilitators recorded my views clearly and respectfully, even when I did not agree with fellow participants.	-	4.58

The unanimously positive evaluation of facilitation was notable. Participants felt that their views had been heard and documented fairly regardless of whether those views ultimately achieved consensus. This perceived procedural fairness may have contributed to the legitimacy of both the consensus statements and the documented no-go zones.

4.12 Summary of findings and provisional assessment of hypotheses

The evidence provided qualified support for both hypotheses tested in this study.

Provisional assessment of H1: Consensus achievement

H1 predicted that through structured deliberation and quality facilitation, residents can achieve 100% consensus on statements addressing contested aspects of local-foreign integration. The evidence partially supported this hypothesis.

Participants achieved 100% consensus on 23 of 67 statements (34.3%), demonstrating that unanimity across residency statuses was achievable on contested integration issues when statements were appropriately framed. The variation by topic was significant: community life achieved 77.8% consensus, education 25.0%, jobs 22.2% and multiculturalism 6.7%.

This pattern suggested that aspirational norms of mutual respect and effort achieved consensus most readily, that distributive questions about jobs and education could achieve consensus through conditional formulations, and that identity questions about multiculturalism and belonging were most resistant to deliberative resolution. The

findings provided empirical support for distinctions between interest-based and identity-based disagreements.

The evidence thus partially supported H1: consensus was achievable, but achievability varied substantially by domain, with identity-related topics proving most resistant to resolution.

Provisional assessment of H2: Collaborative action

H2 predicted that despite differing residency statuses and perspectives, participants can come together to co-create a community project in service of local-foreign integration. The evidence provided preliminary support for this hypothesis.

Participants from different residency statuses (initially seven citizens and three foreigners) came together to develop the Triad Trails heritage project. This collaboration persisted post-conference with institutional engagement from the People's Association, REACH, and the Singapore Government Partnerships Office. The 48-page Residents' Report, co-authored with over 80 revisions across residency lines, provided additional evidence of collaborative capacity.

The evidence thus preliminarily supported H2, though full confirmation will need to await successful implementation of the heritage trail and assessment of its integration outcomes over time.

Implications for bridging social capital

The findings supported Putnam's (2000) contention that bridging social capital could be built through structured cross-cutting interaction. The Consensus Conference created conditions that facilitated bridging social capital formation in ways that casual neighbourhood contact had not. Pre-post survey evidence indicated increased perspective-taking, reduced certainty, and enhanced civic efficacy among participants. Whether these effects would persist over time, and whether they would generalise beyond the self-selected sample in this study, were questions for future research and would be addressed in Chapter 5.

5. Insights and Implications

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 presented the empirical findings from the IPS-REACH Consensus Conference. This chapter interprets those findings for stakeholders responsible for local-foreign relations in Singapore.

The chapter proceeds differently from conventional structure, beginning with policy-relevant implications rather than an assessment on hypotheses. This allows readers to engage directly with interpretation before arriving at formal conclusions.

5.2 Consensus Achieved and How

Multiculturalism and identity proved categorically harder in achieving consensus than jobs or education, suggesting that the deeper integration challenges require sustained civic investment that policy adjustment alone cannot deliver

The sharp divergence in consensus rates across topic domains, documented in Chapter 4, carries implications that extend beyond methodology to the substance of integration policy. The divergence went beyond the degree of consensus achieved. Something categorically different was happening when participants deliberated about multiculturalism, compared with when they deliberated about jobs, education or community life.

On jobs and education, participants could disagree, propose alternative formulations, identify conditions under which competing positions might be reconciled, and often

reach agreement through careful specification of circumstances. The disagreements were genuine and deeply felt, yet they proved tractable because participants were negotiating over how to allocate scarce resources fairly, where conditional formulations offered pathways to common ground.

On multiculturalism, something different occurred. Participants could articulate their positions with clarity, listen to one another with respect and acknowledge the legitimacy of perspectives they did not share. Yet, they could not find formulations that everyone could endorse. The disagreements touched on questions that did not admit conditional resolution: Is Singapore's cultural identity fixed and settled, such that newcomers must adapt to it? Or is it inherently evolving, such that immigration-driven change is simply another chapter in an ongoing story? These are questions where conditional terms such as "when qualifications are equal" offers no path forward.

The domains where consensus proved most elusive were precisely those where policy instruments are weakest. Government possesses substantial tools for adjusting hiring frameworks through instruments like COMPASS, calibrating manpower frameworks, allocating university places and setting scholarship quotas. These are tractable domains where deliberative input can inform policy calibration.

Multiculturalism and identity present a different situation. Government cannot directly determine how residents feel about cultural change, whether they experience newcomers as potential members of the community or as permanent outsiders, or how the sense of "we" evolves as demographic composition shifts. The participant who

observed that his “social contract changed with the government” without explicit negotiation was naming a felt experience that no policy lever can directly address.

This finding aligns with Tay and Mathew’s (2023) observation that immigrant integration in Singapore requires sustained ground-up engagement alongside policy frameworks. Their research on integration in Singaporean neighbourhoods similarly found that structural measures alone cannot address the relational dimensions of belonging. The IPS-OnePeople.sg 2024 study documented related patterns: while almost all respondents agreed Singapore experienced moderate to high levels of racial and religious harmony, concerns persisted about specific domains, and younger Singaporeans held higher expectations for social cohesion even as they perceived discrimination to be rising (Mathew et al., 2025).

For bridging social capital specifically, the implication is significant. Putnam’s (2000) distinction between bonding capital (within groups) and bridging capital (across groups) suggests that the identity domain is precisely where bridging capital matters most; nonetheless, this is the hardest to build through formal mechanisms. While the Consensus Conference generated bridging capital among participants through shared deliberative experience, to scale such capital formation across neighbourhoods and communities requires civic infrastructure that policy can enable and encourage but cannot mandate.

The implication is sobering. The deepest integration challenges, those concerning identity, belonging and the boundaries of the “we”, cannot be addressed through policy adjustment alone. They require sustained investment in civic infrastructure: platforms

for honest conversation about cultural change; opportunities for residents to encounter one another as individuals rather than as representatives of categories; and patient relationship-building that policy can enable though cannot mandate. The participant who suggested treating foreigners as “one of the new cultures or races” was proposing precisely this kind of generational project, extending the logic of Singapore’s founding multicultural framework to encompass immigration-driven diversity through the same patient civic work that built cohesion among the founding generation of Singaporeans over decades.

Jobs, education and community life achieved meaningful consensus through conditional formulations, demonstrating that common ground exists when framed appropriately

While the multiculturalism findings highlighted limits, the other three domains demonstrated deliberation's potential to surface common ground that public discourse obscures. The pattern of success offers insight into how agreement becomes possible on issues that initially appear intractable.

Community life achieved consensus readily because the statements that succeeded were aspirational and symmetrical, calling on both locals and foreigners to demonstrate mutual respect and make sincere efforts at relationship-building. These statements did not require allocation of scarce resources or create winners and losers. They expressed shared values that participants across residency statuses could endorse because endorsing them cost nothing and committed everyone equally. The symmetry of obligation was crucial: statements that placed disproportionate burden on

one group typically failed, while those that distributed responsibility evenly achieved broad acceptance.

Jobs and education involved genuine trade-offs over university places, employment opportunities and public resources. Agreement required a different approach: conditionality. Broad statements of principle divided participants because everyone could imagine scenarios where the principle would produce unfair outcomes. When statements were reformulated to specify the conditions under which they would apply, agreement became possible. The formulation “when qualifications are equal” allowed participants to affirm citizen priority without abandoning meritocratic principles, giving something to both sides without compromising either.

This pattern echoes findings from IPS research on attitudes towards diversity. The IPS-OnePeople.sg study also found that Singaporeans hold nuanced views that can accommodate multiple values simultaneously (Mathew et.al, 2025). Support for meritocracy coexists with recognition that citizens have legitimate claims to priority. The Consensus Conference findings suggest that this nuance extends to local-foreign relations: participants hold complex views that can accommodate both citizen priority and openness to foreign talent when appropriately framed.

For bridging social capital, the tractable domains offer fertile ground. When participants can reach agreement on substantive issues, the experience of successful collaboration itself builds relational ties. The conditional consensus achieved on jobs and education demonstrate that citizens and foreign residents can work together to

find mutually acceptable formulations, an experience that contributed to the local-foreign collaboration that emerged in the Triad Trails project.

The fierce debates that characterise online discourse and media coverage may obscure the middle ground that most residents actually occupy. When participants are given the opportunity to reason together about shared challenges, with time to explore the conditions under which apparent disagreements might be resolved, they can often find formulations that everyone can accept. This finding should temper pessimism about local-foreign relations without encouraging complacency: the consensus achieved required sustained effort, and maintaining this common ground will require ongoing investment in platforms and processes that enable structured engagement.

Consensus on hiring and admissions required the qualifier "when qualifications are equal", with citizens rejecting framings that imply entitlement without competence

The deliberations revealed a specific mechanism through which consensus on distributive questions was achieved: conditionality. Understanding this mechanism has practical implications for how contested issues might be framed to achieve broader acceptance.

Many statements that failed in broad formulations succeeded when reformulated with appropriate conditions. The qualifier "when qualifications are equal" preserved both citizen priority and meritocratic standards, allowing proponents of priority to secure priority while proponents of meritocracy secured the qualification threshold they

insisted upon. Neither camp had to abandon their core commitment to accept the formulation.

Notably, citizens themselves insisted on the qualification. The participant who said she would not want to feel promoted “just because I’m a local” reflected a commitment to meritocracy that was constitutive of how participants understood what it meant to succeed in Singapore. Being promoted without merit would not feel like genuine achievement. Another citizen argued that competition with foreign talent had been personally beneficial and opposed unconditional priority on those grounds.

Skills transfer expectations achieved broader support than hiring preference alone. Participants endorsed the principle that foreign professionals should contribute to building local capability rather than merely filling positions. The concern was that foreign hiring could become self-perpetuating if skills were not transferred: each cycle would create conditions for the next, as the skills gap that justified foreign hiring would never close. Skills transfer requirements addressed this concern by positioning foreign hiring as transitional investment rather than permanent substitution.

The finding suggests that citizen-first policies are more likely to achieve broad acceptance when framed conditionally and coupled with capability-building expectations. Unconditional preference generates resistance from citizens who value meritocracy as well as from foreigners who perceive unfairness, while conditional preference that maintains standards can achieve legitimacy across a broader spectrum.

For bridging social capital, conditionality provides a framework within which both citizens and foreign residents can feel fairly treated. When the rules are clear and principled, relationships can develop without the undercurrent of perceived injustice that undermines interactions. The consensus achieved through conditional formulations demonstrate that common ground exists and can be found when participants engage in good faith.

5.3 What the content revealed about local-foreign relations

Foreign participants voluntarily endorsed citizen priority when framed as fairness, suggesting that local-foreign relations may be less polarised than public discourse implies

One of the most striking findings was that foreign participants themselves endorsed citizen priority, voluntarily and framed in terms of fairness rather than resignation. The non-resident participant who argued that treating citizens “exactly the same as foreigners that could come from anywhere else” would be “just not fair” was making the case for citizen priority more forcefully than many locals in the room, affirming it as legitimate rather than merely accepting a political reality.

The phrase from another non-resident, “that's kind of, it’s Singapore”, was equally revealing, as this participant understood citizen priority as part of how Singapore works, as legitimate house rules rather than discrimination. The framing mattered considerably: when citizen priority was presented as recognition of contribution and obligation rather than as exclusion or hostility, foreign participants could endorse it as reasonable.

The implication is that local-foreign relations may be less polarised than public discourse suggests. The loudest voices in online debate often come from the extremes: citizens who view foreigners as threats, and foreigners who view any differentiation as discrimination. The middle ground occupied by most residents, who accept differentiated treatment based on reciprocity and fairness, receives less attention because it generates less engagement. The Consensus Conference created conditions where this middle ground could emerge and be documented.

Foreign participants were seeking fair treatment within a framework that appropriately recognised differential contribution and obligation, rather than equal treatment in all respects. They accepted that citizens had claims that non-citizens did not. When policy is framed as legitimate house rules grounded in reciprocity rather than as exclusion, it can achieve acceptance across residency statuses, suggesting possibilities for how citizen-first policies might be communicated more effectively.

This finding resonates with Mathew and Zhang's (2023) research on immigrant associations in Singapore, which found that many foreign residents understand and accept differentiated treatment when it is perceived as fair and consistently applied. The willingness of foreign participants to endorse citizen priority suggests that bridging social capital can coexist with, and may even be strengthened by clear frameworks that acknowledge differential obligations. Relationships built on transparent expectations may prove more durable than those premised on ambiguity.

National Service and taxpayer obligations emerged as markers of differential commitment, suggesting that the case for citizen-first policies rests on reciprocity rather than nativism

The deliberations revealed the basis on which citizens grounded their claims to priority. The most frequently cited markers were National Service and taxpayer obligations, both representing commitments that citizens make and that most foreign residents do not share.

The contrast between “here to stay” and “earning money and go back”, articulated by a local participant, captured a distinction that both local and foreign participants recognised as relevant. Citizens bear structural obligations: CPF contributions, National Service and the inability to simply leave if conditions become unfavourable. Another participant framed immigration’s purpose in complementary terms, suggesting that immigrants “are supposed to support and be part of our workforce”, articulating a conception of immigration as supplementary rather than substitutive.

The distinction between reciprocity and nativism carries considerable weight for public discourse. Nativist framings ground citizen claims in birth and generate resistance from foreign residents who perceive them as hostile, sitting uncomfortably with Singapore's own history as a nation of immigrants. Reciprocity framings ground citizen claims in contribution and obligation and can be endorsed by fair-minded people regardless of citizenship status, as the foreign participants in this study demonstrated. The practical implication is that citizen-first policies can be defended on principled grounds that do not require hostility towards foreign residents. The case for citizen priority rests on what citizens give rather than on what foreigners lack. Public

communications that emphasise this reciprocity basis may achieve broader acceptance than communications that emphasise competition, scarcity, or threat.

For bridging social capital, the reciprocity framing offers a foundation for relationships built on mutual respect rather than resentment. When citizens feel their contributions are recognised and foreign residents understand the basis for differentiated treatment, interactions can proceed from a position of clarity rather than grievance. The deliberations demonstrate that this mutual understanding is achievable when space is created for honest exchange.

Government communications that emphasise foreign contributions while staying silent on citizen contributions, or that consider citizens as grant recipients rather than stakeholders, risk eroding trust

The deliberations surfaced concerns about government communications that participants experienced as recognition failures, with two distinct patterns emerging: narratives of omission and framings of dependency.

Narratives of omission referred to communications that foreground foreign contributions to Singapore's economy while remaining silent on citizen contributions when it comes to the local-foreign domain. Participants observed that public messaging often emphasised what foreign talent brings, including skills, investment and global connections, without equally acknowledging what Singaporeans contribute through labour, taxes, National Service and commitment to the nation's future. This asymmetry was experienced as a signal that citizens' contributions were taken for granted while foreigners' contributions required public affirmation. This asymmetry

also seemed to carry an implicit message about whose contributions counted and whose were expected as baseline.

Framings of dependency referred to language that positioned citizens as recipients of government generosity rather than as stakeholders exercising entitlements. The “tuition grant” example illustrated this dynamic vividly. Participants did not dispute that Singaporeans received substantial subsidies for higher education. What generated strong response was the implication that citizens were recipients of government largesse rather than stakeholders of a system they help fund. This captured a felt relationship by local participants with the state in which citizens approach government as petitioners rather than as stakeholders.

This observation connects to scholarship on procedural justice and recognition. Tyler’s (1990) research demonstrated that how people are treated often matters as much as what they receive, while Fraser’s (1997, 2003) framework distinguishes redistribution from recognition as different dimensions of justice. Citizens who feel their contributions are overlooked may withdraw trust and engagement even when policy substance serves their interests.

The deliberations also revealed how weak data discoverability can trigger speculation, worst-case assumptions and misinformation. This surfaced when participants tried to find the percentage of undergraduates in publicly subsidised autonomous universities who are Singapore citizens. Participants searched actively but could not find the figures on the Ministry of Education (MOE) “Autonomous Universities” page or on the respective universities’ websites, which many participants treated as the natural

places to look. Some participants then turned to generative AI tools, which returned inconsistent estimates and increased uncertainty. Small-group facilitators flagged this, and the research team directed participants to the relevant parliamentary reply on MOE's website. Locating it required several non-obvious steps (MOE homepage → Newsroom → News → keyword search → parliamentary reply). The core issue concerns discoverability rather than availability: the data existed in an official source, yet it did not appear where the public would reasonably expect to find it. Transparency without discoverability weakens the shared factual baseline deliberation requires and increases the risk of misunderstanding and misinformation.

The implication is that communication practices warrant review with attention to recognition and framing. This concerns how existing policies are described and what the language implies about different groups' standing, rather than changing substantive policies themselves. For bridging social capital, recognition dynamics matter considerably. When citizens feel that their standing is affirmed, they may be more open to engaging constructively with foreign residents. When they feel overlooked, resentment can undermine relationships regardless of the substantive fairness of policies.

5.4 Structural conditions

Long-term foreign residents who wish to sink roots but perceive PR pathways as inaccessible described feeling "permanently temporary", raising questions about alignment between integration expectations and belonging pathways

The deliberations surfaced a tension that complicates integration messaging and may affect talent retention. Foreign residents are encouraged to integrate: to learn local norms, participate in community life, build relationships and contribute beyond their economic roles. Yet, some long-term residents described pathways to permanent belonging as opaque or inaccessible.

The 10-year foreign resident who found PR "near impossible" despite wanting to stay was describing a condition of integration without feeling a sense of belonging. His children had "become adults living in Singapore" yet could not become PRs. To label this group as transient, he felt, was unfair given their demonstrated commitment through years of residence, work, cultural integration and community participation. Additionally, Employment Pass holders shared how they needed to hit the next salary bar so that their Employment Passes would be renewed. This meant that they needed to spend most of their time at work.

The implications extend in several directions. First, there is a credibility challenge for integration messaging. When foreign residents are told to integrate yet cannot see a pathway to permanent status regardless of effort, the integration message may ring hollow. Why invest in deep relationships if departure remains the likely outcome? The rational response to permanent temporariness may be precisely the superficial "hi-bye" engagement that participants described.

Second, these dynamics can affect talent retention. Some foreign residents may hesitate to commit long term if they experience Singapore as offering stability in practice but uncertainty in status. When pathways to permanent residence or citizenship feel unclear, even highly committed residents may reassess whether to stay. If institutional signals leave long-term belonging uncertain, the system may retain fewer residents it hopes will settle and build long-term ties in Singapore.

Third, a Singaporean participant extended empathy to foreign professionals whose perceived aloofness might reflect rational response to Employment Pass conditions rather than dispositional indifference. Employment Pass holders face demanding schedules and must demonstrate ongoing value to secure renewals. Time invested in neighbourhood relationships is time unavailable for career-building activities that determine whether they can remain at all. The structure of the manpower system shapes behaviour in ways that may be misinterpreted as lack of integration intent.

The findings do not prescribe policy direction in this area. The observation is that current arrangements may create a gap between what is asked of foreign residents and what is perceived as offered in return, with consequences for both integration outcomes and talent retention.

For bridging social capital, the permanently temporary condition poses a structural barrier. Deep relationships require long-term investment that is difficult to justify when one's tenure in the community is uncertain. Addressing this barrier, whether through

clearer pathways or more realistic messaging about what integration can and cannot lead to, would create conditions more conducive to bridging social capital formation.

The thin "hi-bye" coexistence documented in neighbourhoods suggests that current integration efforts are producing tolerance but not trust, a stable but potentially fragile equilibrium

The pattern documented in Chapter 4, of surface civility without thick relationships, carries implications beyond description. Residents acknowledged one another's presence and maintained cordial relations in common spaces yet rarely developed deep cross-residency friendships. The participant's question, "How do we get to know each other?" implied that current arrangements did not provide an answer.

The absence of conflict is a low bar for social integration. The equilibrium was stable in that it did not generate friction, yet it had not produced relationships that could withstand strain. Some participants observed that grievances were suppressed rather than addressed, finding expression on online platforms rather than in dialogue that might produce mutual understanding.

The IPS-OnePeople.sg 2024 study documented related patterns at national level: shrinking friendship circles, declining cross-racial friendships, and persistent social distance on questions of intimate relations (Mathew et.al, 2025). While that study focused on relations among Singaporeans, the underlying dynamics, particularly the thinning of social networks, have implications for local-foreign relations as well. If friendship networks are shrinking generally and becoming less diverse, the foundation for thick integration is weakening even as surface tolerance remains stable.

The finding from this study suggests that tolerance should not be mistaken for integration. Current arrangements may be producing coexistence without cohesion: a live-and-let-live equilibrium that serves adequately under benign conditions yet seems to lack resilience. Economic downturn, resource scarcity, or triggering incidents could expose the shallowness of ties that have never been tested. Building deeper relationships would require intentional investment in platforms for sustained engagement rather than reliance on the absence of conflict.

For bridging social capital, the hi-bye pattern represents precisely the absence of the deep cross-cutting ties that Putnam (2000) identified as essential for diverse societies. The Consensus Conference demonstrate that such ties can form when structured opportunities are created, yet scaling such opportunities across neighbourhoods would require sustained investment in civic infrastructure.

5.5 Method value

Emotion and narrative surfaced recognition anxieties that standard consultation mechanisms do not capture, suggesting value in deliberative approaches for high-stakes social cohesion issues

The Consensus Conference treated emotion and narrative as valid inputs to public reasoning alongside facts and principles. Consistent with Young's (2000) argument that deliberation should include testimony and storytelling, participants were invited to share personal experiences in conditions where stories of loss, exclusion, and frustration could be voiced without judgment.

This design choice proved essential. Much of what surfaced would not have emerged through standard consultation mechanisms such as surveys, feedback forms or public town halls. These mechanisms capture stated preferences and policy reactions, yet they are less effective at surfacing the underlying anxieties, status concerns, and recognition needs that drive those preferences. Focus group discussions can surface some of these dynamics, yet the sustained multi-session format of the Consensus Conference allowed deeper exploration and relationship-building than single-session formats typically permit.

The recognition anxieties that emerged concerned questions of standing and respect rather than policy substance alone. Participants could engage constructively with hiring criteria, university admissions, and community norms. What generated the most emotive responses were questions about whether Singaporeans would continue to feel that Singapore was their country, and whether foreign residents would be

welcome as potential members of the community or merely as economic inputs. These accounts described recognition deficits from both sides.

The deliberative format allowed these anxieties to be voiced and heard across residency statuses. The acknowledgment that “lived reality is different” from policy intention created space for mutual recognition. Policy might be well designed, yet implementation could still produce felt injustice. Both could be true simultaneously. The format created space to hold this complexity.

Stereotypes were challenged through narrative exchange. When a foreign participant suggested citizen priority would breed laziness, local participants responded with counterexamples from hiring experience. Neither side fully convinced the other, yet the exchange moved beyond trading accusations to engaging with specific evidence. Pre-post survey evidence documented the effects: participants reported increased comfort engaging across difference, with non-residents showing the largest decreases in certainty about their own views and citizens showing the largest increases in perspective-taking.

The finding suggests that deliberative approaches may have distinctive value for high-stakes issues where recognition and identity are at stake. Standard consultation mechanisms serve important purposes and should not be displaced. When issues touch on standing, respect and belonging, however, formats that create space for emotion and narrative may surface dynamics that other mechanisms cannot reach.

For bridging social capital, the emotive dimension of deliberation may be as important as the substantive outcomes. The experience of being heard and understood across residency statuses, even when disagreement persists, can build relational ties that purely transactional interactions cannot generate. The collaborative projects that emerged from the Consensus Conference, including the Triad Trails initiative and the jointly authored Residents' Report, demonstrate that shared deliberative experience can translate into ongoing cooperation.

5.6 Findings in relation to hypotheses and research question

Having interpreted the findings across their policy and theoretical dimensions, this section returns to the study's formal hypotheses to render assessment.

H1: Consensus achievement

H1 predicted that through structured deliberation and quality facilitation, residents can achieve 100% consensus on statements addressing contested aspects of local-foreign integration.

H1 is supported for aspirational and appropriately conditioned distributive statements. Participants achieved 100% consensus on 23 of 67 participant-generated statements (34.3%), with community life achieving 77.8%, education 25.0% and jobs 22.2%. These findings demonstrate that unanimity across different residency statuses is achievable when conditions are favourable and participants' statements are appropriately framed.

H1 is partially supported for identity-related statements. Multiculturalism achieved only 6.7% consensus. The domain variation documented throughout this chapter suggests that identity-constitutive questions may not admit the kind of conditional resolution that works for distributive questions in initial deliberative encounters. This finding does not indicate that deliberation is unsuitable for multiculturalism questions. Rather, it suggests that more sustained engagement may be needed, and that deliberation's value in the identity domain lies in building relational foundations and shared understanding that can support future consensus-building, rather than in producing immediate agreement.

This pattern aligns with findings from IPS research on intergroup relations in Singapore, which has documented that understanding develops incrementally through sustained engagement rather than through one-off interventions (Mathew et al., 2025). The Consensus Conference represents a beginning rather than an end point for deliberative engagement on multiculturalism questions.

H2: Collaborative action

H2 predicted that despite differing residency statuses and perspectives, participants can come together to co-create a community project in service of local-foreign integration.

H2 is supported. A working group comprising seven Singapore citizens and three foreigners formed to develop the Triad Trails heritage initiative, demonstrating that participants from different statuses chose to continue collaborating after structured sessions ended. The group submitted a funding proposal, received provisional

support, and the project was being considered for expanded implementation at the time of writing.

The 48-page Residents' Report, with over 80 revisions negotiated across residency lines, provided additional evidence of collaborative capacity extending beyond the specific project. Full assessment awaits project implementation and longitudinal evaluation through future research, yet the current evidence supports the hypothesis that deliberation can generate collaborative action across residency statuses.

RQ1: Assessment

The research question asked: To what extent can a structured consensus conference in Singapore produce (a) 100% consensus on participant-developed statements addressing contested aspects of local-foreign integration and (b) subsequent local-foreign collaborative action through a participant-initiated community project?

The answer is that structured deliberation can produce both outcomes, though with domain-dependent variation. Consensus was achievable on aspirational norms and distributive questions when statements were formulated with appropriate conditionality. Consensus proved elusive on identity-constitutive questions, where participants could articulate their differences with clarity even as they could not transcend them through deliberation alone. Local-foreign collaboration emerged and persisted, suggesting that deliberation can build bridging social capital even when formal consensus on all questions is not achieved.

The broader implication is that deliberative value extends beyond the consensus it produces. It also lies in the relationships that deliberation builds, and the clarity it brings to disagreements that dialogue alone cannot resolve. The Triad Trails project demonstrates that collaborative action can emerge from deliberation even where some disagreements persist, pointing towards a model of ongoing civic engagement rather than one-off consultation.

5.7 Limitations

Several limitations warrant attention when interpreting the findings. The study drew on 24 participants, so findings do not support statistical generalisation. Quota sampling achieved broad coverage, including a roughly two-thirds citizen / one-third non-citizen mix, near male-female balance (54% male, 46% female) and some socio-economic spread (13% non-PME; 25% unemployed) across ages 21 to over 70. Even so, the sample skewed older (71% over 40) and highly educated (over 70% with at least a bachelor's degree), which may shape deliberative dynamics and limit transferability to lower-income, younger and less formally educated groups.

Selection effects are inherent to voluntary deliberative methods. Participants who volunteered likely differed systematically from the general population in civic-mindedness, openness to dialogue, and baseline attitudes. The high baseline agreement on mutual respect (over 95% pre-deliberation) suggests that participants arrived already disposed towards constructive engagement, and results may overstate feasibility of consensus among less motivated or more polarised groups.

The study was conducted in a single constituency. Local-foreign dynamics may differ elsewhere in Singapore with different demographic compositions, housing types or community histories.

Assessment of H2 remained preliminary at the time of writing, as the Triad Trails project was ongoing. Whether it is implemented successfully, and whether bridging capital persists over time, requires longitudinal follow-up through future research.

The research team's involvement in design, facilitation and analysis created the possibility that researcher expectations influenced the process. These concerns are inherent to practitioner-researcher studies and cannot be fully eliminated.

These limitations were anticipated and addressed where possible in the study design, as detailed in Chapter 3. The open recruitment approach meant that the research team could not determine sample composition, though efforts were made to achieve diversity through targeted outreach. The findings demonstrate what is possible under favourable conditions and with motivated participants, providing proof of concept rather than definitive evidence of what deliberation can achieve at scale.

5.8 Recommendations

Drawing on the findings and analysis presented in this chapter, three recommendations are offered for consideration by stakeholders responsible for local-foreign relations in Singapore.

Dedicate institutional attention to local-foreign relations as a distinct dimension of Singapore's multiculturalism, whether through expanding the mandate of existing bodies or establishing new civic infrastructure, to address the identity and belonging questions that policy adjustment alone cannot resolve

Singapore's existing infrastructure for managing race and religion — including the Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles (IRCCs) and OnePeople.sg has developed substantial expertise in fostering social cohesion in Singapore. The National Integration Council (NIC) has also done extensive integration work fostering belonging among newcomers. The study's finding that multiculturalism achieved only 6.7% consensus, compared to 77.8% on community life norms, suggests scope to extend and deepen this work.

The participant who proposed treating foreigners as "one of the new cultures or races" was articulating an extension of Singapore's founding multicultural logic to encompass immigration-driven diversity. Just as the nation invested decades of patient civic work in building cohesion among Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others, similar investment may be needed to address the relational dimensions of local-foreign integration.

Two approaches warrant consideration. The first would expand the mandate of existing bodies[6] such as IRCCs, OnePeople.sg or the People's Association to include structured engagement on local-foreign relations, building on their established networks and expertise. Government consultations run by REACH could similarly incorporate deliberative formats that surface the recognition and identity dynamics the Consensus Conference revealed. The second approach would establish dedicated infrastructure, such as a centre with a specific mandate on multiculturalism, to develop sustained programming and expertise in this domain.

Either approach should recognise that identity and belonging questions cannot be resolved through policy calibration alone. They require platforms for honest conversation, opportunities for residents to encounter one another as individuals, and patience with a timeline that extends beyond one-off interactions.

Review public communications with attention to recognition, framing and data discoverability to reduce space for misinformation and ensure balanced acknowledgment of contributions

The study surfaced concerns about government communications that participants experienced as recognition challenges. Two patterns, narratives of omission and framings of dependency, suggest that how policies are communicated may affect trust and engagement independently of policy substance.

A review of public communications in the local-foreign domain could attend to several dimensions. First, messaging that foregrounds foreigners' contributions could be

[6] See Section 2.2 for existing efforts.

balanced with explicit acknowledgment of what citizens contribute through labour, taxes, National Service and commitment to the nation's future. The goal is to ensure that public communications recognise foreign contributions while affirming citizens' contributions with comparable clarity and prominence.

Second, policy language that frames citizens as recipients of government generosity, such as "tuition grant", could be reviewed for alternatives that position citizens as stakeholders drawing on benefits tied to citizenship and contribution. The concern raised by participants suggests that labels can shape how citizens interpret their standing.

Third, data relevant to local-foreign questions, such as the composition of university student demographics, could be made more discoverable on official channels. The university composition example demonstrates how absence of readily available data created space for speculation and misinformation that a parliamentary question eventually addressed. Discoverability would provide common factual ground for public discourse.

Expand the consensus conference pilot to other constituencies and other contested issues where identity and recognition are at stake, to build bridging social capital

The IPS-REACH Consensus Conference demonstrate that structured deliberation can help build bridging social capital across residency statuses, generate collaborative action, and surface common ground on contested issues. The question is whether these findings hold across different contexts and issue domains.

Expansion to other constituencies would test whether the patterns documented in Changi Simei, including the domain variation in consensus rates, the effectiveness of conditional formulations, and the emergence of local-foreign collaboration, can be replicated in areas with different demographic compositions, housing types, or community histories. Constituencies that have experienced more direct friction around local-foreign issues, or where demographic shifts have been more rapid, might produce different results that would deepen understanding of the method's applicability.

Extension to other contested issues where identity and recognition are at stake would test whether the deliberative approach has value beyond local-foreign relations. Issues such as LGBTQ+ inclusion, intergenerational equity or religious accommodation similarly involve questions of belonging and recognition that standard consultation mechanisms may not fully surface. Building the evidence base across multiple issue domains would clarify the boundary conditions for deliberative consensus and identify the contexts where the approach adds most value.

Such expansion would require investment in facilitator training, process documentation, and evaluation frameworks to ensure that lessons are captured and disseminated. The People's Association, REACH and community partners could collaborate on piloting adapted versions of the consensus conference model, with IPS or other research institutions providing research support.

5.9 Summary of Findings

The IPS-REACH Consensus Conference demonstrate that structured deliberation can produce meaningful consensus on contested local-foreign integration issues while building bridging social capital across residency statuses.

The findings revealed that different types of questions have different amenability to deliberative resolution. The tractable domains of jobs, education and community life achieved meaningful consensus through conditional formulations that preserved both citizen priority and meritocratic standards. The intractable domain of multiculturalism and identity, where consensus reached only 6.7%, requires sustained civic investment that policy adjustment alone cannot provide. The deepest integration challenges concern identity, belonging, and the boundaries of the “we”, and these can only be addressed through patient relationship-building that extends beyond one-off interactions.

For stakeholders, the study surfaced findings that warrant consideration. Foreign residents may be more accepting of citizen priority than public discourse suggests, provided it is framed as fairness grounded in reciprocity rather than exclusion. Government communications warrant attention to recognition dynamics, including both what is said about foreign contributions and what is not said about citizen contributions. The gap between integration expectations and perceived belonging pathways for long-term foreign residents creates credibility challenges that affect both integration outcomes and talent retention. And the superficial “hi-bye” coexistence in neighbourhoods represents tolerance without trust, stable yet potentially fragile.

The fundamental question of how Singapore maintains social cohesion as demographic composition continues to evolve remains open. The Consensus Conference demonstrate that residents of different backgrounds can reason together constructively when appropriate conditions are created. They can find common ground on many questions even as some disagreements prove intractable. Whether Singapore chooses to invest in creating more such opportunities, and whether such investment can build the bridging social capital needed for an open yet cohesive society, are questions that lie beyond this study's scope though within its implications.

6. Conclusion

This study examined whether structured deliberation can support the building of bridging social capital across local-foreign lines in Singapore. Through an IPS-REACH Consensus Conference conducted in Changi Simei and East Coast GRC, 24 residents of different residency statuses deliberated over four sessions on contested integration statements. They generated 67 participant statements, achieved unanimous consensus on 23 of them and produced a collaborative ground-up project that continued beyond the formal sessions.

The question on whether structured deliberation can lead to consensus and common ground, rather than conflict and division, in Singapore matters because of what scholarship on social capital has documented. In his influential “E Pluribus Unum” lecture, Putnam (2007) found that, in the short to medium run, immigration and ethnic diversity tend to reduce social solidarity in American communities. In more ethnically diverse neighbourhoods, residents of all backgrounds were more likely to “hunker down”: withdrawing from collective life, trusting their neighbours less and reporting fewer close friends, with this reduction in trust extending even to members of their own group. Putnam’s constrict theory describes an initial response to diversity where people withdraw socially. This withdrawal reduces both in-group (i.e., bonding social capital) and out-group (i.e., bridging social capital). This offers a cautionary tale for diverse societies.

Singapore’s context gives this concern practical weight. Non-residents comprised 2.9% of the total population in 1970. By 2025, this proportion had grown to approximately 31%. The question animating this study was whether the 'hunkering

down' response is inevitable, or whether structured deliberation can generate bridging social capital across residency statuses even as diversity increases.

The findings suggest that “hunkering down” is not inevitable. Pre-post survey evidence documented meaningful shifts among participants. Singapore citizens showed the largest gains in perspective-taking, reporting increased comfort engaging with people whose backgrounds or perspectives differ from their own. Non-resident participants showed the greatest intellectual humility, recording the largest reductions in certainty that their views on local-foreign integration were correct after encountering information and narratives during the sessions. Agreement that both locals and foreigners should make equal effort to know each other rose from 83.3% to 95.8%. Trust in government increased for both groups, with non-residents registering the highest cumulative shift on whether citizens in Singapore have a say in what the government does. Overall, the Consensus Conference widened perspective-taking, strengthened reciprocity norms, and lifted civic efficacy among participants.

These attitudinal shifts translated into collaborative action. A working group comprising seven Singapore citizens and three foreigners formed voluntarily to develop the Triad Trails heritage ground-up project, demonstrating that participants from different residency statuses chose to continue collaborating after the formal sessions ended. The 48-page Residents' Report, with more than 80 revisions negotiated across residency lines, provided additional evidence of collaborative capacity. Deliberation built bridging social capital that persisted beyond the structured sessions.

The findings also revealed important variation across domains. Jobs, education and community life achieved meaningful consensus through conditional formulations. The qualifier “when qualifications are equal” allowed participants to affirm citizen priority without abandoning meritocratic principles. Community life achieved 77.8% consensus on participant-generated statements. Multiculturalism achieved only 6.7%. The key difference lies in what participants were disagreeing about: allocation rules in some domains, belonging in others. The key contrast is qualitative: some domains involved rules and trade-offs, others involved identity and belonging. Distributive questions, concerning the allocation of university places or employment opportunities, could be resolved through conditionality. Identity questions, concerning who belongs to the “we” and how it may change, did not admit such resolution. Participants could articulate their differences with clarity yet could not transcend them through conditional formulation.

Perhaps the most striking finding was that foreign participants themselves endorsed citizen priority when it was framed as fairness rather than exclusion. The non-resident who argued that treating citizens “exactly the same as foreigners” would be “just not fair” was making the case for citizen priority more forcefully than many locals in the room. The polarisation between locals and foreigners may be less deep than public discourse suggests. The middle ground occupied by most residents, who accept differentiated treatment based on reciprocity and fairness, receives less attention because it generates less engagement online. The Consensus Conference created conditions where this middle ground could emerge and be documented.

The deliberations also surfaced patterns that warrant attention. The “hi-bye” coexistence documented in neighbourhoods, where residents acknowledge one another's presence and maintain cordial relations yet rarely develop deep cross-status friendships, represents tolerance without trust. This equilibrium serves adequately under benign conditions yet may lack resilience under stress. The “permanently temporary” condition described by long-term foreign residents, who perceive belonging pathways as inaccessible regardless of their contributions, complicates integration messaging and affects both integration outcomes and talent retention.

Singapore has built substantial infrastructure[7] for race and religion to foster social cohesion among Singaporeans. The Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles, OnePeople.sg, and related institutions represent decades of patient work across the Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian and Other communities. The local-foreign dimension warrants similar attention. Current frameworks address diversity among Singaporeans. The study’s finding that multiculturalism achieved only 6.7% consensus, while community life norms achieved 77.8%, suggests that identity and belonging questions require dedicated focus that existing structures may not fully provide.

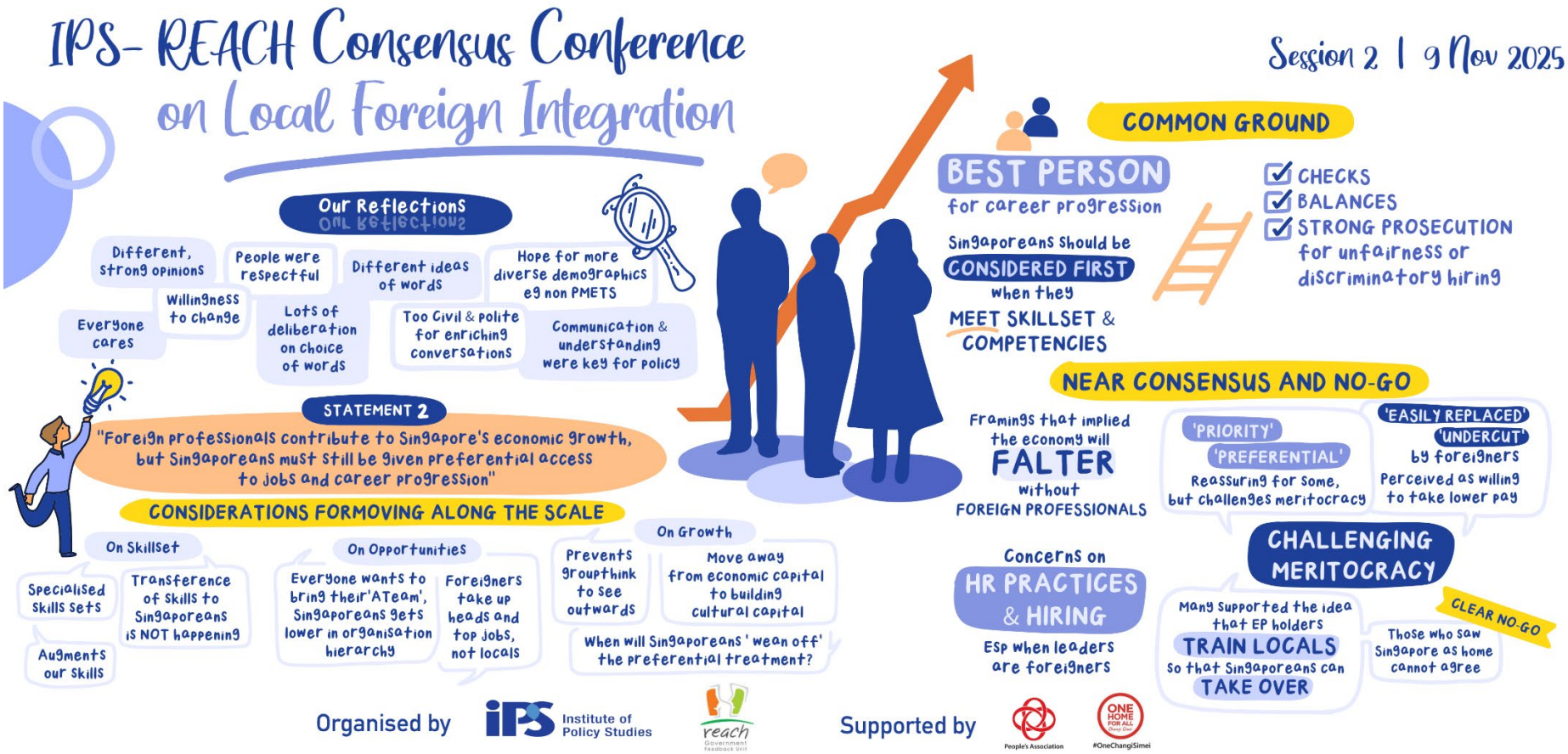
The governance direction is encouraging. The Singapore Government Partnerships Office, launched in January 2024, formalises structures for citizen-government partnership. REACH, marking its 40th anniversary in 2025, is expanding towards people-to-people dialogue alongside government-to-people engagement. Prime Minister Wong’s call at REACH’s anniversary for common and safe spaces for

[7] See Section 2.2 for existing efforts.

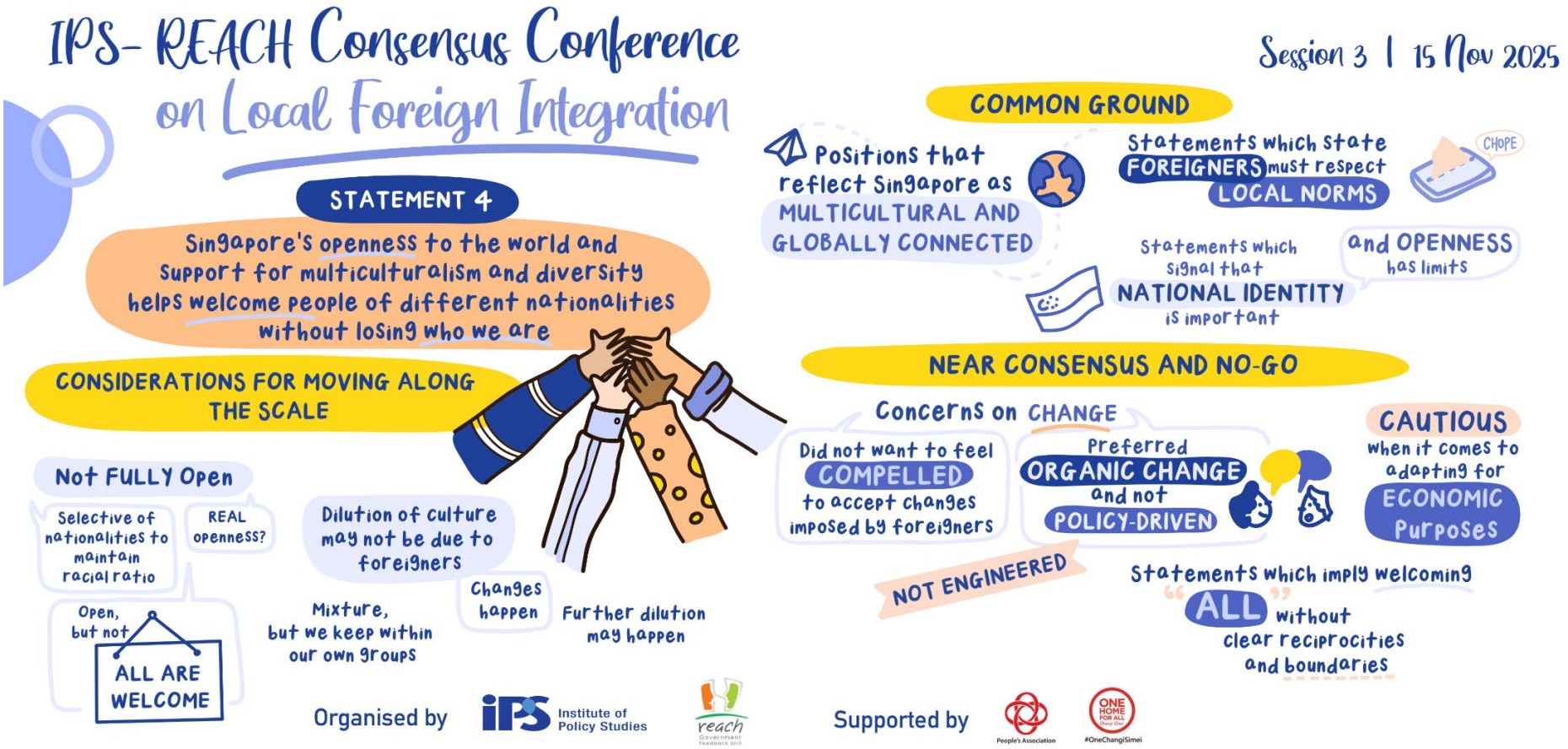
Singaporeans of different backgrounds to meet, talk and build a common understanding, especially on issues where it is difficult to see eye-to-eye articulates the approach the Consensus Conference tested. The study suggests three areas warranting consideration: first, dedicated institutional attention to local-foreign relations, whether through expanding existing bodies or establishing new infrastructure; second, review of public communications in the local-foreign domain with attention to recognition, framing and data discoverability; and third, expansion of the consensus conference pilot to other constituencies and contested issues. Chapter 5.8 outlined these recommendations in detail.

The work of local-foreign integration is generational, just as race and religion has been for decades. Building bridging social capital across local-foreign lines requires sustained investment in civic infrastructure, patient relationship-building and acceptance that some disagreements may take years to work through. Singapore's next chapter calls for what Prime Minister Wong has described as a "we-first society". The study suggests that such a society requires deliberate cultivation of bridging social capital. The "we" cannot be assumed. It must be built through everyday practices of contribution and reciprocity, civic habits that keep Singapore's diverse communities cohesive, and confidence that newcomers can share in these norms while existing residents protect what is precious. If Singaporeans can deepen bridging social capital while addressing the anxieties that accompany demographic change, Singapore can remain what it has long aspired to be: a community of purpose that seeks not "me first" "we-first".

Appendix A: Visual Facilitation for each of the Consensus Conference Deliberative Sessions


IPS- REACH Consensus Conference
on Local Foreign Integration
Session 2 | 9 Nov 2025
Our Reflections
Different, strong opinions
People were respectful
Different ideas of words
Hope for more diverse demographics eg non PMETS
Willingness to change
Everyone cares
Lots of deliberation on choice of words
Too Civil & polite for enriching conversations
Communication & understanding were key for policy
STATEMENT 2
"Foreign professionals contribute to Singapore's economic growth, but Singaporeans must still be given preferential access to jobs and career progression"
CONSIDERATIONS FORMOVING ALONG THE SCALE
On SkillSet
Specialised Skills Sets
Transference of Skills to Singaporeans is NOT happening
Augments our Skills
On Opportunities
Everyone wants to bring their 'ATeam', Singaporeans gets lower in organisation hierarchy
Foreigners take up heads and top jobs, not locals
On Growth
Prevents groupthink to see outwards
Move away from economic capital to building cultural capital
When will Singaporeans 'wean off' the preferential treatment?
COMMON GROUND
BEST PERSON
for career progression
Singaporeans Should be CONSIDERED FIRST when they MEET SKILLSET & COMPETENCIES
CHECKS
BALANCES
STRONG PROSECUTION for unfairness or discriminatory hiring
NEAR CONSENSUS AND NO-GO
Framings that implied the economy will FALTER without FOREIGN PROFESSIONALS
'PRIORITY'
'PREFERENTIAL'
Reassuring for some, but challenges meritocracy
'EASILY REPLACED'
'UNDERCUT'
by foreigners
Perceived as willing to take lower pay
CHALLENGING MERITOCRACY
Concerns on HR PRACTICES & HIRING
Esp when leaders are foreigners
Many Supported the idea that EP holders TRAIN LOCALS So that Singaporeans can TAKE OVER
CLEAR NO-GO
Those who saw Singapore as home cannot agree
Organised by
Institute of Policy Studies
reach
Supported by
People's Association
#OneChangiSimei


IPS- REACH Consensus Conference
on Local Foreign Integration
Session 2 | 9 Nov 2025
STATEMENT 3
Singaporeans should be given priority at local education institutions, including universities, even as we uphold the principle of meritocracy
CONSIDERATIONS FOR MOVING ALONG THE SCALE
For the Singaporean
Downstream impact eg ways of studying affecting ways of working
Education should be a birth right
System to support different talent until university
as people can already pay for a place in an overseas university
For non-Singaporeans
Prioritised if a Singaporean is unable to get a place upon repeated applications
Assessment on readiness to join the system eg. knowledge on SG cultures
COMMON GROUND
MERITOCRACY as the organising principle
Part of SOCIAL COMPACT
Entry into local institutions
Within qualified pool SINGAPOREANS Should have CLEARER & MORE SECURE PATHWAYS
Local institutions to remain OPEN to STRONG FOREIGN STUDENTS who enrich academic community
NEAR CONSENSUS OR NO-GO
'EQUALLY QUALIFIED' local and foreign candidates felt unrealistic as interpretation will differ
Proposals with QUOTAS on foreign students felt blunt
No consensus on FEE DIFFERENCES between citizens, PR and foreigners
SCHOLARSHIPS for foreign students attracted MIXED views
Priority for CITIZENS was key
Organised by
Institute of Policy Studies
reach
Supported by
People's Association
ONE HOME FOR ALL
#OneChangiSimei


IPS- REACH Consensus Conference
on Local Foreign Integration
Session 3 | 15 Nov 2025
STATEMENT 4
Singapore's openness to the world and support for multiculturalism and diversity helps welcome people of different nationalities without losing who we are
CONSIDERATIONS FOR MOVING ALONG THE SCALE
Not FULLY Open
Selective of nationalities to maintain racial ratio
REAL openness?
Open, but not
ALL ARE WELCOME
Dilution of culture may not be due to foreigners
Changes happen
Mixture, but we keep within our own groups
Further dilution may happen
COMMON GROUND
Positions that reflect Singapore as MULTICULTURAL AND GLOBALLY CONNECTED
Statements which state FOREIGNERS must respect LOCAL NORMS
CHOPE
Statements which signal that NATIONAL IDENTITY is important
and OPENNESS has limits
NEAR CONSENSUS AND NO-GO
Concerns on CHANGE
Did not want to feel COMPELLED to accept changes imposed by foreigners
Preferred ORGANIC CHANGE and not POLICY-DRIVEN
NOT ENGINEERED
CAUTIOUS when it comes to adapting for ECONOMIC Purposes
Statements which imply welcoming "ALL" without clear reciprocities and boundaries
Organised by
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ONE HOME FOR ALL
#OneChangiSimei

Appendix B: Pre-Post Survey Questions Mean Scores

How interested are you in issues relating to local-foreigner integration in the community? (e.g., building mutual understanding and inclusion)			Do you discuss issues relating to local-foreign integration with Singaporeans?		Do you discuss issues relating to local-foreign integration with Non-Singaporeans (residing in Singapore)?		How informed do you feel about issues relating to local–foreigner integration in Singapore?		
[Score: 1Not at all, 2Slightly, 3Moderately, 4Very, 5Extremely]			[Score: 1Yes, 0No]		[Score: 1Yes, 0No]		[Score: 1Not at all, 2Slightly, 3Moderately, 4Very, 5Extremely]		
Pre-CC	**Post-CC**	**Shift**	**Pre-CC**	**Post-CC**	**Pre-CC**	**Post-CC**	**Pre-CC**	**Post-CC**	**Shift**
4.13	4.13	0	0.90	0.80	1.00	1.00	3.29	3.21	-0.08

How sure are you that your views relating to local-foreign integration are correct, given that others may not share your views?			I am comfortable engaging with people whose backgrounds or perspectives differ from mine.			I value different perspectives from others even when I disagree with them.			I am better informed about Singapore's public policies than most people are.		
[Score: 1Not at all, 2Slightly, 3Moderately, 4Very, 5Extremely]			[Score: 1Strongly Disagree 2Disagree 3Neutral 4Agree 5Strongly Agree]			[Score: 1Strongly Disagree 2Disagree 3Neutral 4Agree 5Strongly Agree]			[Score: 1Strongly Disagree 2Disagree 3Neutral 4Agree 5Strongly Agree]		
Pre-CC	**Post-CC**	**Shift**	**Pre-CC**	**Post-CC**	**Shift**	**Pre-CC**	**Post-CC**	**Shift**	**Pre-CC**	**Post-CC**	**Shift**
3.13	2.83	-0.29	4.25	4.50	0.25	4.29	4.42	0.13	3.38	3.46	0.08

I believe the Singapore government seriously considers recommendations made by citizens at public engagement sessions.			The Singapore government cares about what citizens think.			I believe that the Singapore government is committed to partner citizens to build our future Singapore.			Citizens in Singapore have a say about what the government does.		
[Score: 1Strongly Disagree 2Disagree 3Neutral 4Agree 5Strongly Agree]			[Score: 1Strongly Disagree 2Disagree 3Neutral 4Agree 5Strongly Agree]			[Score: 1Strongly Disagree 2Disagree 3Neutral 4Agree 5Strongly Agree]			[Score: 1Strongly Disagree 2Disagree 3Neutral 4Agree 5Strongly Agree]		
Pre-CC	**Post-CC**	**Shift**	**Pre-CC**	**Post-CC**	**Shift**	**Pre-CC**	**Post-CC**	**Shift**	**Pre-CC**	**Post-CC**	**Shift**
3.50	3.71	0.21	3.54	3.63	0.08	3.71	3.71	0.00	3.58	3.88	0.29

Someone like me can contribute to making decisions in my community (Changi Simei / East Coast).			Everyone living in Singapore – whether local or foreign – should treat each other with respect and consideration in everyday life and in shared spaces.			Both locals and foreigners should make equal effort in getting to know each other and build deep relationships in the community.			Foreign professionals contribute to Singapore's economic growth, but Singaporeans must still be given preferential access to jobs and career progression.		
[Score: 1Strongly Disagree 2Disagree 3Neutral 4Agree 5Strongly Agree]			[Score: 1Strongly Disagree 2Disagree 3Neutral 4Agree 5Strongly Agree]			[Score: 1Strongly Disagree 2Disagree 3Neutral 4Agree 5Strongly Agree]			[Score: 1Strongly Disagree 2Disagree 3Neutral 4Agree 5Strongly Agree]		
Pre-CC	**Post-CC**	**Shift**	**Pre-CC**	**Post-CC**	**Shift**	**Pre-CC**	**Post-CC**	**Shift**	**Pre-CC**	**Post-CC**	**Shift**
3.75	3.96	0.21	4.63	4.79	0.17	4.04	4.42	0.38	4.04	3.83	-0.21

Singaporeans should be given priority at local education institutions, including universities, even as we uphold the principle of meritocracy.			While foreigners bring their own culture and values to Singapore, foreigners are still expected to follow Singapore's local norms and culture over time.			Singapore's strong sense of openness to the world and support for multiculturalism and diversity helps us welcome people of different nationalities without losing who we are.		
[Score: 1Strongly Disagree 2Disagree 3Neutral 4Agree 5Strongly Agree]			[Score: 1Strongly Disagree 2Disagree 3Neutral 4Agree 5Strongly Agree]			[Score: 1Strongly Disagree 2Disagree 3Neutral 4Agree 5Strongly Agree]		
Pre-CC	**Post-CC**	**Shift**	**Pre-CC**	**Post-CC**	**Shift**	**Pre-CC**	**Post-CC**	**Shift**
4.33	4.42	0.13	4.33	4.46	0.13	3.83	4.08	0.25

Appendix C: Data Sets referenced in Executive Summary

Table A: Participants (24 residents of different residency statuses)

Residency Status	Count of Residency Status
Non-Resident	5
Permanent Resident	3
Singapore Citizen	16
Grand Total	**24**

Table B: Singapore citizens showed highest cumulative gains on comfort engaging with people whose backgrounds or perspectives differed from their own.

Residency Status	"I am comfortable engaging with people whose backgrounds or perspectives differ from mine." (mean pre-post shift score)	"I value different perspectives from others even when I disagree with them." (mean pre-post shift score)
Singapore Citizen	**+6**	+2
Permanent Resident	0	0
Non-Resident	0	+1

Table C: Non-resident participants recorded largest reductions in certainty that their views on local-foreign integration were correct, signalling a recalibration after encountering information and narratives during the sessions.

Residency Status	"How sure are you that your views relating to local-foreign integration are correct, given that others may not share your views?" (mean pre-post shift score)
Singapore Citizen	-2
Permanent Resident	-1
Non-Resident	**-4**

Table D: Trust in government increased for both groups, with non-residents registering the highest cumulative shift on whether citizens in Singapore have a say in what the government does.

Residency Status	"Citizens in Singapore have a say about what the government does." (mean pre-post shift score)
Singapore Citizen	+3
Permanent Resident	0
Non-Resident	**+4**

Table E: Citizen participants showed the highest positive shift on whether someone like themselves can contribute to community decisions, suggesting enhanced civic efficacy.

Residency Status	**"Citizens in Singapore have a say about what the government does." (mean pre-post shift score)**
Singapore Citizen	**+4**
Permanent Resident	+2
Non-Resident	-1

Table F: Overall evaluations of the Consensus Conference were positive: 95.8% of participants reported a positive overall experience, 91.6% described it as meaningful, and 87.5% felt the process was empowering. Additionally, 83.3% believed the model could be replicated across other constituencies, communities or topics.

	Strongly Agree	**Agree**
"Overall, I had a positive experience participating in the Consensus Conference."	62.5%	33.3%
"Overall, I feel that the Consensus Conference was a meaningful experience for me."	58.3%	33.3%
"Overall, I feel that the Consensus Conference was an empowering experience for me."	58.3%	29.2%
"Overall, I feel that the Consensus Conference can be replicated in other constituencies, communities, or topics."	58.3%	25%

Appendix D: Near Consensus Participant-Generated Statements (at least 85%)

Jobs

1. *Necessary measures are taken to ensure Singaporeans are given preferential access to jobs and proper upskilling or skill-training programmes.*
2. *MOM must be transparent in their investigation of any reports of hiring infringement or wrongful sacking or retrenchment practices*
3. *Regarding career progression, merit and job performance should be prioritised regardless of residential status*
4. *Meritorious foreign professionals augment Singapore's economic growth. Locals should have priority in access to jobs and career advancements based on merit.*
5. *Foreign professionals do contribute to Singapore's economic growth, but preferential treatment should be given to Singaporeans, all things being equal, whenever possible*
6. *With all things and circumstances being equal, both locals and foreigners should bring to the table performance value and meaningful contributions to be able to enjoy job security and career progression*

Education

1. *Singaporeans should be given priority at local education institutions, including universities when their qualifications are equal to that of PRs and foreigners in terms of merit*
2. *All things being equal, Singapore citizens must be given priority to institutes of higher learning for undergraduate education*
3. *All Singaporeans should have access and priority to deserving local institutions including universities, with additional smaller pool (that is capped) for meritorious foreign talent (without any subsidy)*
4. *As long as the student qualifies, priority should be given to Singaporean for entry to local education institutions, including universities*
5. *Singaporean students should pay a citizen rate, the term tuition grant makes students look like supplicants and conditional.*

6. *Singaporeans should be given priority at local education institutions, including universities if admission requirements are met. However, if so, universities must be given leeway to include a small percentage of foreigners for diversity, and not just a saturation of local talent*

Multiculturalism / Openness

1. *Singapore's openness to the world and the government's support for multiculturalism and diversity make the country a welcoming destination to people of different nationalities*
2. *Singapore welcomes foreigners to add diversity to our multicultural population. Foreigners must be respectful of local values and culture and not impose their values or norms*
3. *Singapore government and residents welcome foreigners to contribute to the country and the cultural diversity while accepting the changes on identity*
4. *Openness is valuable, but cohesion does not happen automatically - it needs intentional policies, integration support and shared norms*
5. *Singapore's DNA is strongly woven on multiculturalism. Its diversity and inclusion welcomes the world, while upholding Singapore's traditions and values*
6. *People should be open-minded to individual behaviours instead of attributing their personality traits to their culture*
7. *Singapore's multiculturalism helps welcome talent and investment while maintaining Singapore status as a global hub without losing our identity*
8. *Singapore residents should accept and understand people of different nationalities without losing who we are and foreigners must respect the host country*
9. *Singapore residents should be mindful of each other's culture*

Appendix E: Common Ground Participant-Generated Statements (100%)

Community

1. *I believe all residents should make efforts in learning and accepting each other in the country*
2. *Both locals and foreigners should make a sincere initiative to reach out to the community with the intent to live harmoniously and peacefully with one another*
3. *Both locals and foreigners should make a conscious effort to know each other and build tolerance and understanding*
4. *Both locals should make conscious and sincere efforts to get to know one another and establish understanding, tolerance and acceptance within the community*
5. *Even though I wasn't born here, Singapore is my home. There is no place like home*
6. *Both locals and foreigners should make effort in getting to know each other & build cordial relationships in the community.*
7. *All residents should keep an open mind, unless it's unlawful and disrespectful, to build harmonious relations in the country.*
8. *I believe in Singapore our government can act as a leader to step in to help integrate local community to create a common ground with activities and events.*
9. *I believe in Singapore everybody needs to be respectful in order to maintain a cordial relationship*
10. *I believe both sides need to come forward and engage, either with a hello or an effort to help out*
11. *Both foreigners and locals must respect each other and make effort to build a community*
12. *In Singapore, I believe that mutual respect and social cohesion is important*
13. *In Singapore, I believe that no one is above the law and justice must be accessible and equal to all fairly*
14. *More events focused on local foreigner integration can be organised for both locals and foreigners to build relationships*
15. *In Singapore, we believe it takes strong collaboration between locals, foreigners and Government to make integration work*

16. *In Singapore, we believe foreigners have value and should not take their residence for granted*
17. *In Singapore, we believe that it takes 2 hands to clap to build a harmonious society*
18. *It takes 2 hands to clap, when in Rome, do what the Romans do!*

Jobs

1. *Foreign professionals may be hired but Singapore would be considered first for jobs. Best person (could be local, could be foreign) for career progression*
2. *Check, balance, and strong prosecution as mandated by the government must be in place on companies with respect to hiring practices*
3. *Singaporeans must be given preferential treatment only if and only when they meet the required skillset or competencies for hiring, and not career progression*
4. *Singaporeans have the strength and adaptability to foster working relationships with the foreign professionals to contribute to Singapore's economic growth.*

Education

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Multiculturalism / Openness

1. *Singapore residents should accept and understand people of different nationalities without losing who we are and foreigners must respect the host country*

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