

Community integration fund; \$5.1m spent on 220 integration projects \$3.1m more allotted to help new immigrants and foreigners fit in

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THE Community Integration Fund (CIF) has disbursed \$5.1 million, out of \$10 million, to about 220 projects and has allotted another \$3.1 million to new spending.

Launched in September 2009 by the National Integration Council (NIC), the CIF offers funding for projects that help new immigrants and foreigners integrate with Singaporeans.

Up to 80 per cent of total expenditure, or up to \$200,000, can be doled out for each project. The majority of these are organised by community groups, including grassroots bodies, associations, clans and non-profit organisations. Schools have received funding from the CIF as well.

The original mandate was to disburse \$10 million over three years. In response to queries from The Straits Times, the NIC said that as the initial timeline comes to a close, there are plans to extend the CIF as "integration requires sustained effort over a long period of time". Details are still being worked out, an NIC spokesman added.

Since 2009, projects funded by the CIF have included those organised by artists, students and medical workers to bridge the gap between locals and foreigners.

Experts agreed that it was difficult to assess the "success" of the projects funded by the CIF - that is, if they have improved relations between the two groups.

"A high participation rate or enthusiasm for a community cause may not necessarily translate to greater integration between the newcomers and locals," said Dr Selina Lim, a senior lecturer at UniSIM, who described the projects as a "good first step" towards better understanding between the two groups.

"Ultimately, it's the quality - not the quantity - of interaction during as well as after the CIF project that would be a better measure of the level of success."

These thoughts were echoed by Dr Leong Chan Hoong, a research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, who added that because the CIF and the NIC are relatively new, "policymakers should allow more time for the two initiatives to develop".

The NIC was also established in 2009.

Dr Leong said that other indicators of effective integration include the percentage of immigrant unemployment, home ownership and participation in national service and the civil service.

Mr Seah Kian Peng, chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Community Development, Youth and Sports, said the CIF was necessary to support integration efforts.

He said: "The right question we should ask ourselves is, can we afford not to have a CIF?"

"While we may not know the full impact of its benefits and effectiveness, I have no doubt that it is necessary and is an investment towards upkeeping our social harmony and building a more inclusive society."