

The Community Engagement Programme



ON THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

Speaking at the National Seminar on Community Engagement in 2007, DPM Wong said that *“When persons across all our society - from schools, to grassroots, to community and religious groups, to the work-place, to the national media and so on - are sensitised and vigilant against such a (radicalisation) threat, we develop the reflexes to spot trouble signs, and ensure that we nip trouble in the bud whenever possible.”*

“This is critical especially when an incident HAS occurred. Tensions will be high as people are traumatised and anxious. In such a situation, people are susceptible to rumours and to stereo-typing which can spur irresponsible knee-jerk reactions. When 9-11 happened, many anti-Muslim reactions on the ground in the US were mindless but real - even Sikhs suffered because some Americans thought wearing a turban was synonymous with being a Muslim.”

“We must never allow such a thing to happen here. But to do this, we must first recognise that it CAN happen. Therefore, we need to be PREPARED and mobilise our people to be watchful and prevent trouble-makers or reckless behaviour on the ground from provoking a wider reaction.”

“... the effectiveness of the CEP will only really be known when we are tested by adversity like a terrorist incident impacting our social resilience and communal relations. The work is never done because our society is dynamic and changing and the world is full of surprises and new challenges. In this sense the CEP is and should always be a work in progress.”

“... the CEP raises the odds in our favour as it prepares us to respond in a crisis, not as isolated individuals or parochial groups but as one people, as Singapore United.”

BACKGROUND TO THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

1. After the London bombings in July 2005, we asked ourselves whether we should do more to enhance our social resilience. The threat of extremist terrorism will not go away anytime soon and increasingly, we see involvement by homegrown elements.
2. We asked ourselves *'how would our people react after a terrorist attack in Singapore? Especially if the perpetrators were homegrown?'* While we think that our good communal relations built up over the years would stand us in good stead, we also realise that this cannot be taken for granted.
3. Extremist rhetoric and sensitive political developments around the world can have a negative effect on our people. We must prepare our people to be more resilient and cohesive.
4. Firstly, we must counter the extremist ideology. Secondly, we know that, in the immediate aftermath of a crisis, it could be difficult for communities to remain calm and avoid knee-jerk reactions. *Communities need to trust each other and know what needs to be done to stay united before any crisis strikes.*

Having strong networks of trust and being committed to maintaining good relations is important. But we need to do more – we need to prepare and exercise people *to know what to do and what to expect in a crisis.*

What is the CEP?

5. The CEP is a long-term effort to ensure that we are better equipped to maintain our social cohesion and harmony, should there be a terrorist attack in Singapore. We want to bring together Singaporeans from different communities, to strengthen inter-communal bonds, and to put in place response plans to help deal with potential communal tensions after an incident e.g. a terrorist attack.
6. The basic structures for the CEP at the national level have been put in place. At the national level, we have established the following structures:

Ministerial Committee for Community Engagement – To ensure better coordination and coherence of our CEP activities, a Ministerial Committee for Community Engagement chaired by DPM Wong has been set up to oversee the plans within the Government to support the communities, so that they can respond effectively during a crisis.

Community Engagement Steering Committee – The executive arm is the Community Engagement Steering Committee chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Steering Committee provides the operational leadership and coordination for the CEP, and ensures the integration and operational readiness of the various community response plans.

Cluster Lead Agencies – Five government agencies provide the respective interface between the Government and community leaders under their clusters. They are the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports for religious groups and ethnic-based organisations, Ministry of Education for the educational institutions, Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts for the media and arts cluster, Ministry of Manpower for businesses and unions and People's Association for the grassroots organisations.

Ground-up approach

7. Since the launch of the CEP, we have seen many activities and initiatives undertaken by the communities in the areas of:

- **Building awareness** of Singapore's diversity and the need for racial and religious harmony;
- **Building understanding and forging bonds;**
- **Involvement and participation** from the community; and
- **Building capacity** to enhance social resilience

This is in line with our ground-up approach as we want the communities to take ownership of the CEP, and develop and nurture the initiatives. The government will play the role of a facilitator, and provide support and resources where necessary.

What is our role in CEP at the individual level?

- **Understand the need for the Community Engagement Programme**
 - ✓ Recognise the importance of the Community Engagement Programme
 - ✓ Identify your role in the Community Engagement Programme
 - **Build Bonds and Community Networks of Trusts**
 - ✓ Help build networks of trust in the community
 - ✓ Promote practices which foster inter-communal bonding and interpersonal bonds to help buffer against potential misunderstandings
 - ✓ Forge unity and build resilience by empowering the community to deal with communal tension
 - **Develop capabilities and resources to cope with crises and emergencies**
 - ✓ Readiness can help us lower our vulnerabilities. We must be prepared to cope with emergencies, and get trained, so that we know how to respond.
 - ✓ Developing emergency response capabilities and building psycho-social resilience within the community
 - ✓ Be resilient and ready
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**Our survival as a nation
depends on us.**

**Let us work together
to keep Singapore resilient
and united.**

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