

MINISTER JOSEPHINE TEO'S CLOSING REMARKS AT THE FORWARD SG

ENGAGEMENT ON ENHANCING DIGITAL ACCESS

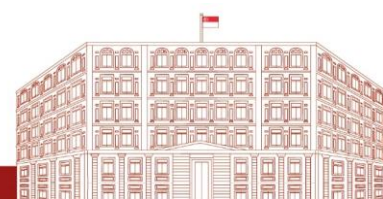
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1. Firstly, I want to thank all of you for making time to join us for today's session. We are still in the festive period and I appreciate that while there are many other commitments and activities, whether at work or at home, you have chosen to spend this afternoon with us. It is really something that we don't take for granted.
2. In just one and a half hours, I took away many learning points from your experiences on the ground. Some of you have participated in Forward SG conversations, and you would know that Forward SG is an attempt for us to refresh our social compact and share how we can move forward as one nation, one people, leaving no one behind. Through the exercise, we also want to ensure that opportunities continue to be widely available for everyone in Singapore.
3. There is also a digital dimension to refreshing our social compact, which we could describe as the 'digital social compact'. If we were to flesh it out further, it is about how we enable every citizen to thrive in the digital age, and to feel that it is safe, inclusive and caring as he or she engage in activities online.
4. One of the participants mentioned that to be able to even address questions on digital inclusion is a privilege. Let me share with you why this is so. Not so long ago I was in Davos attending the World Economic Forum where the international community is very interested in knowing how Singapore is doing in many areas of digital. I met up with one of my long-time friends, a ministerial counterpart. We got to chatting about our various challenges and of course, both of us are very committed to digital inclusion. I asked her: "What is the single most difficult issue that she had to work on?" She said, amongst other things, that in some parts of the country, they are still dealing with problems of basic sanitation and extreme poverty. Against this backdrop, I thought that it was worth keeping in mind that we are in a privileged situation to have foundations of digital inclusion that we could continue to build on.
5. So here are my three main takeaways of today.
6. Firstly, we have to continue to strengthen our digital access. Today, 99% of households in Singapore has broadband access; let's not forget the remaining 1%. 92% of households have computer access; let's never forget the other 8%. Participants have also noted that beyond just having schemes in place, we have to make access to schemes more readily available. We must go one step further and ask ourselves, 'Are these schemes well known enough? Can the application process be made and seamless? Can we make it more convenient? Can we



provide greater flexibility so that people really are able to get hold of what they want and not just what is imagined to be required for them?’

7. I am very glad to hear from many members who have participated in this conversation that the one way we can do this is to ride on existing schemes, programmes and touchpoints we already have. We should look at it from the point of view of the beneficiaries and ask: “Can we make it more seamless, convenient, flexible for them, using existing touchpoints that already exist?” Many of the social services agencies that you are part of have these touchpoints. We must think of better ways to link up with those who need this access and work through you. So that's something that we will do.
8. My second takeaway is that, just because someone has access doesn't mean that they will be able to go online and use digital services with confidence. To build confidence require skills and training.
9. The training has to be thoughtfully considered and timely. If there is a discontinuity between when the person gets hold of the device and when they acquire the skills to use it, and the training provided has a gap, you might have lost the person's interest.
10. We have to flip the way we think about training. Rather than to say here's what you need, it's more a question of encouraging the person that: “Here is how you can get what you want (through training).” So instead of asking somebody: “Do you like to learn about e commerce?”, which may cause them to reply: “Why would I want to learn about e commerce?” Instead, we can ask: “Would you like to get the best deal in town? Would you like to stretch your dollar? Would you like to expand your career options? Would you like to stay more connected with friends and family?” These are the motivations that people have to use digital services. We have to look at it from their point of view of what it does for them, rather than what we imagine will be the need.
11. I think that's a very powerful takeaway that can radically transform the way in which we organise our services, to enable more of citizens to be competent, to acquire more skills that will enable them to succeed in the digital age.
12. There was also another very important takeaway with regard to skills and training. Probably the best people to deliver skills development and training are the peers themselves. A senior is best placed to provide lessons to another senior who hopes to require some skills. So, I think we can strengthen this aspect of it.
13. The third takeaway is that I also very much appreciate your honesty, your candid acknowledgement of the fact that we need partners because government cannot do it alone. We fully embrace your willingness to partner with us.



14. We are fortunate that we had started Digital for Life (DfL) of which many of you are already partners. DfL is the platform to bring the partners together. So, my additional takeaway today is that whilst DfL, as a partner has the potential to bring different entities together on the ground, there are still gaps on the ground, being able to connect the different sources of expertise.
15. You will still need a bridge. Perhaps we can think of our SG Digital Office (SDO) as a bridge to identify the needs and then connect those in need to where the sources of help can be provided. This is also an important gap that we must fill.
16. So, my three main takeaways are:
 - 1) How can we improve digital access?
 - 2) How we can raise the level of skills
 - 3) How we can strengthen the partnership, not just at the national level, but also at the ground level.
17. And my commitment is a very simple one, which is that we promise to work on all this.
18. When we first started DfL honestly, we had no idea how far I could go. But the groundswell of support, the willingness to come forward, to help strengthen the digital social compact, is very valuable.
19. Thank you once again. This has been a really rich learning experience for all of us.

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