

POST-BUDGET 2026 YOUTH CONVERSATION SESSION NOTES

25 MARCH 2026, 7.00PM - 9.15PM

*SCAPE GROUND THEATRE

On 25 March 2026, 151 youths from diverse backgrounds came together to discuss and share their sentiments on Budget 2026 announcements.

The session was co-organised by the Ministry of Finance (MOF) and the National Youth Council (NYC), and involved the following panellists and moderator:

- Mr Jeffrey Siow, Acting Minister for Transport and Senior Minister of State for Finance
- Ms Goh Hanyan, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Culture, Community and Youth and Sustainability and the Environment
- (Moderator) Ms Melody Madhavan, Investor, Cento Ventures and NYC INSPIRIT Youth Leader

The session began with a Gallery Walk featuring three stations aligned with the Budget themes: (i) Advancing Our Economy, (ii) Securing Good Jobs and (iii) Uplifting Singaporeans to Progress Together. Participants viewed infographics about the key measures in Budget 2026, shared their views and engaged in facilitated conversations.

Ms Lee Yuan Ting, Senior Associate, MOF, provided an overview of Budget 2026, followed by facilitators sharing insights from the Gallery Walk discussions. The session concluded with a panel dialogue where participants engaged with the panellists on a range of issues relating to key themes and measures of Budget 2026.

Key Insights from the Gallery Walk and Panel Dialogue

Theme: Advancing Our Economy

Issue: Singapore needs to maintain economic growth and enhance business productivity and innovation amidst an increasingly volatile global environment.

Discussion points from Gallery Walk:

- Participants said that Artificial Intelligence (AI) development was expected and necessary and looked forward to the six months of free premium AI tools access for selected SkillsFuture courses. They also said they were cautious about the long-term effects of AI and were concerned about its impact on arts and culture, including loss of human creativity, copyright issues, job displacement for creatives, and environmental consequences.

Key insights from panel dialogue:

The moderator asked panellists what were some interesting AI innovations seen in other markets that could be relevant to Singapore.

- Panellists shared how AI innovations could create job opportunities for youths in AI and technology if cutting-edge AI companies like FieldAI were to operate in Singapore. They also shared how AI rapidly evolved from primitive systems like IBM Watson to today's

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accurate and accessible AI tools. The emergence of social media platforms where AI bots communicated with each other without humans had also raised important questions about AI safety and the need for regulations to protect vulnerable groups in the community.

A participant asked (via Slido) if there was a way to prevent AI from leaking into the creative sector where emotion and human touch were key.

- Panellists said that while AI was a useful tool, human creativity remained important as original ideas and creative direction had to come from humans. They said that while big tech companies used AI for technical tasks such as drug discovery, they noted that it was not for creative work which required human expression.

A participant asked how the Government might protect creative industries from AI influence including safeguarding creative jobs and livelihoods.

- Panellists acknowledged the concerns of the impact of AI on jobs and noted that this went beyond the creative sector. They encouraged youths to leverage AI as a tool, which could lead to a shift of focus on higher-level tasks such as strategic planning and creative problem-solving which could help to increase productivity. For example, AI could help creative jobs in Singapore by enabling local artists to use AI tools to compete more effectively with lower-cost overseas work, and added that the Government would work with artists and creators to ensure Singapore's laws protected them while encouraging them to use AI as a helpful tool.

Theme: Securing Good Jobs

Issue: Balancing the needs of the workforce to secure meaningful employment and remain competitive, in alignment with citizens' passions and aspirations.

Discussion points from Gallery Walk:

- Participants said that the rapid changes in AI would result in some groups being left behind, and schooling youths were concerned that they did not have relevant skills when they entered the workforce. They said that they valued the Government's support through SkillsFuture but wanted more hands-on, real-world learning, and called for more training opportunities for all Singaporeans.
- Participants said that AI tools would benefit various industries by providing faster access to learning and helping teachers and healthcare workers process information efficiently. They said that human communication skills and qualities like empathy in patient care remained irreplaceable, with AI managing routine tasks so workers could focus on people.

Key insights from panel dialogue:

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Participants asked how youths could navigate job market challenges and uncertainty, make career choices amid rapid changes, and address concerns about being left behind amid rapid changes in AI.

- Panellists shared that job anxiety was a normal concern, and graduates should expect non-linear career paths and be willing to experiment. They said that employers valued critical thinking, positive attitude and willingness to try new things beyond technical skills. Youths were also better positioned to use AI and could learn faster than older workers, creating a more level playing field.
- Panellists said that the Government was aware of the challenges faced by graduates in the job market and had introduced traineeship and mentorship programmes to connect youths with experienced mentors, and added that financial literacy education was important to help youths understand the actual costs of living, making financial concerns less intimidating.

A participant asked (via Slido) what resources were available for youth who wanted to transition careers after working for a few years, and how the current Budget supported people willing to change their career paths.

- Panellists said that SkillsFuture provided structural government support for adult learning throughout one's career, which no other country offered, highlighting the Job Support Scheme and Level Up programme which provided support. They said that the merger of SkillsFuture and Workforce Singapore would also ensure that upskilling led to actual job placement outcomes by better connecting skills training with employers who were hiring, addressing feedback that people were unsure whether SkillsFuture programmes would help them find jobs.

Theme: Uplifting Singaporeans to Progress Together

Issue: To ensure that all Singaporeans are supported, it is essential to strengthen social support systems that foster inclusivity and progress.

Discussion points from Gallery Walk:

- Participants said that cost of living was a major concern that affected multiple aspects of life, including their ability to care for their elderly parents and family planning.
- Participants said strengthening Singaporean identity beyond racial distinctions was important and asked the Government for more resources and support to help develop a “We-First” mindset.

Key insights from panel dialogue:

The moderator asked panellists how the Government was helping Singaporeans, especially low-income families, deal with rising costs and the energy crises.

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- Panellists shared that given the global uncertainties and disruptions in the supply chain, there would be an impact on the overall cost-of-living, but the Government was prepared to provide support for Singaporeans if necessary, with more targeted help given to lower-income families and affected sectors like transport.

A participant asked (via Slido) about plans to mitigate rental increases for local businesses in heritage areas such as Haji Lane.

- Panellists said that the Government's approach which relied on market mechanisms, noting that while localised spikes occurred in high-demand areas, overall rental data across Singapore had not increased beyond fundamentals. There were more room for interventions in HDB estates such as through placemaking to curate tenant mix. They also highlighted MCCY's role in helping heritage businesses through skills development, technology adoption, and appealing to younger audiences to increase their revenue and competitiveness.

A participant asked how the Government would diversify risk and look for alternative sources of critical commodities given the current global political instability in the Middle East.

- Panellists shared that Singapore had constantly found ways to diversify its economy, hence we were able to maintain a stable fuel supply and mitigate costs shocks amidst global shortage. For example, Singapore's food security strategy was to diversify its food sources, and the refreshed Singapore Food Story was built on four key pillars: (i) import diversification; (ii) local production; (iii) stockpile, and (iv) global partnerships. However, this strategy required community resilience and adaptability, with Singaporeans willing to accept alternative food options during shortages.

A participant asked how the Government could address citizens' expectations of receiving vouchers during crises.

- Panellists said that while the Government would roll out support measures for Singaporeans, the guiding principle was that the support would be targeted so that greater support would be given to those who need more, such as vulnerable groups like lower-income and elderly. They also highlighted that the Government was always conscious that it was funding expenditure in an equitable manner, citing the funding of flood protection infrastructure across several decades so as not to overly burden any one generation.

Closing Remarks by Panellists

The moderator asked panellists to highlight one important takeaway from Budget 2026 for youths and to give their closing remarks.

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- Panellists concluded the session by highlighting that the Budget 2026 reflected the Government's short-term and long-term priorities for Singapore. They said that key initiatives such as the comprehensive AI plan and the SG Partnerships Fund highlighted the Government's commitment to empower citizens to take action by preparing for their future and providing funding support for their initiatives.
- Panellists added that the next generation were stewards of Singapore so everyone would have a shared responsibility to keep building Singapore. They also encouraged participants to look out for the SG Youth Plan to be launched later in the year and to participate in the NYC ecosystem.

Notes recorded by the NYC Youth Leadership and Engagement team.