



Festival of Social Science 2026– Event Leader Pack

#ESRCFestival 17th October – 7th November 2026

www.festivalofsocialscience.com

2026 Theme – Money, Finance and the Cost of Living

Overview

We are looking forward to planning the programme of events we will be running for FoSS 2026, which can be delivered in person, online or hybrid. All event types are welcome – talks, exhibitions, quizzes, performances, craft activities, debates, pop-up stall etc.

We hope you find the information in this pack helpful and please get in touch if after reading this there is anything of which you are not sure.

This event pack relates to planning and running individual events for the 2026 Festival of Social Science. It contains requirements from ESRC for your event, as well as guidance to help make your event a success. It should be read by all event leaders, as well as festival team members.

We encourage you to read this pack before you make a proposal for an event and refer to it as you develop your event plans.

For information and requirements relating to your institution’s festival, please refer to your local festival team.

Event target audience

Festival of Social Science events may be targeted at **public and/or youth audiences** or another **non-academic group**.

- **By ‘public and youth audiences’** we mean children and adults who are either:
 1. Attending an event out of interest, rather than because it relates to their work or studies *or*
 2. Attending an event that relates to pre-university-level studies (e.g. a course at school or FE college) or decisions around applying for undergraduate-level studies (e.g. tasters of university study for students in sixth form/S6).
- **By ‘other non-academic groups’** we mean people attending an event because it relates to their work or a position of responsibility that they hold, which is outside of the HE sector – for example policymakers, professionals from the public, private or third sectors, or those holding voluntary posts a particular field.
- Festival events **should not** be targeted at academic audiences (people attending an event because it relates to their work as a researcher or other university staff member, or in relation to undergraduate/postgraduate studies).
- ‘Public’ does not have to mean ‘open to and suitable for everyone.’ We encourage our partners and event leaders to consider which particular ‘public’ each event should focus on and why, and tailor accordingly. The NCCPE has a useful guide to **‘Who are the public?’**. Please also read the guidelines in the following section.

ESRC aims for the 2026 festival to increase its reach with public and youth audiences, and the festival team at your institution has been asked to aim for at least 80% of events at your institution to be targeted at public and/or youth audiences, with a maximum of 20% targeted at other non-academic groups.

ESRC also aims to ensure that all events are genuinely tailored to and engaging for the attendees they are listed as being targeted at. Please make use of this guide and any other resources and support available to you to help achieve this aim.

Guidelines for targeting public and professional audiences and meeting expectations.

Consider who your target audience should be right from the outset. Even if you are aiming at a public or youth audience, narrow down who exactly you wish to target and tailor your event accordingly, rather than trying to attract and please all of 'the public' or all young people of a particular age.

Initial decisions

Good questions to consider include:

1. **Is there a particular reason why you want to engage with the public, or other group?** For example, your motivation might be "to help people improve their wellbeing by spending time outdoors" or "to encourage more people to study my subject at university". This can help you to decide who to target.
2. **Who do you want to aim your event at, and what characteristics are they likely to have?** For example, what will their existing knowledge of and attitude to your topic be? What is their likely educational level? Can you connect your topic to a particular leisure interest, e.g. targeting keen gardeners?
3. **What would motivate them to take part?** For example, pre-existing interest in the topic, relevance to an aspect of their life, a learning experience for their children, for a fun or moving experience to share with a friend? Understanding why they might attend can help you make sure you meet their expectations.
4. **What time, day of the week and duration that will work best for them?** For example, evenings and weekends are usually best for groups that include working-age adults.
5. **Do you have a good understanding of your target group yourself, and the ability to reach and attract them?** It is worth considering working with a partner organisation such as a community group or charity that has closer links to them.
6. **Is there someone from outside academia you could invite to join you who would appeal to and/or have credibility on the topic in the eyes of your audience?**
 - a. For example, if giving a talk on sustainability in retail, having a manager at a major retailer as one of the speakers.
 - b. Is there a relevant practitioner who could lead a practical, participatory activity – e.g. in 2021 the event "Catching your breath: workshop to promote wellbeing among young people" had a breath coach/yoga teacher to lead a practical session of breathing exercises to join in with at home.
7. **For in-person events, is the group you are targeting likely to be comfortable and motivated to visit a university campus?** A different venue will work better for some groups, for example a familiar venue they visit regularly.
8. **Is it practical for them to attend a virtual event?** For example, are you confident that they will be regular internet users with good internet connections and appropriate devices? If so which platform(s) are they most familiar with?
9. **When they see your event advertised, what assumptions will they make about it?** For example, adults seeking a cultural night out with friends may assume that an exhibition or performance will provide a full evening's entertainment; those with a pre-existing interest in your field may assume that your talk will increase their knowledge rather than introduce

the basics. This can help you describe and promote your event to attract your target group, meet their expectations and manage the expectations of those who were looking for something different.

Detailed planning

- Think carefully about the terminology you will use and whether your target audience will understand it. Sanity check with people who fall into your target audience category – ‘Do you know what X means?’ Then decide which words you can use, which you need to explain the first time you use them and which you need to ditch.
- Think carefully about use of graphs, statistical terms etc on your slides – will the audience you are aiming at understand them?
- If you plan to cover a specific piece of research (your own or someone else’s) consider how/why it is of relevance to your target audience. What if anything might they want to do with the information? And what are the practical constraints for them around this? In many cases this will be of more interest than the detail of how the research was carried out or its academic context.
- Consider attention spans! Even for adults, if an event lasts over an hour, it will need to include a break.

Useful resources

Resources that can help thinking about audiences include:

- The UWE Bristol Science Communication Unit’s *Event Public Engagement* guide ([Courses and training at the Science Communication Unit \(SCU\) - Science Communication Unit | UWE Bristol](#)), which is very useful regardless of whether you class your research area as science!
- The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE)’ guides for public engagement practice and policy ([Resources | NCCPE \(publicengagement.ac.uk\)](#)).
- The Arts Council’s Generic Learning Outcomes model is helpful in appreciating the different forms that learning from an arts or cultural event can take (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/measuring-outcomes/generic-learning-outcomes#section-1>).
- You may also find inspiration in audience segmentation tools such as Culture Segments (<https://mhminsight.com/culture-segments>) and Audience Spectrum ([Audience Spectrum | The Audience Agency](#)), and the British Science Association’s science engagement map (<https://www.britishtscienceassociation.org/blog/updates/our-science-engagement-map>).

Skills and training to run a great event

The festival team is arranging public engagement training with Engagement Trainer and Consultant Jamie Gallagher. These sessions are mandatory for all event leads to attend. Further details of these sessions will be communicated to your institution's festival lead.

Inspiring a public audience requires a slightly different skillset from those required in academia. If you or anyone else involved in your event is speaking or giving a presentation and has limited experience of doing so outside of academic contexts, you/they may benefit from additional training in public speaking/presentation skills or seeking constructive feedback from a colleague. Areas worth focusing on include the following.

- **Presentation structure.** A good presentation structure for a non-academic audience is likely to be a bit different. Consider starting with an enticing hook and making key points upfront.
- **Use of slides.** Avoid cramming slides with lots of text; relevant images can be impactful, as can graphs or charts that illustrate key points and are comprehensible by your target audience.
 - You can then talk around your slides, meaning that your audience will focus on you rather than sitting reading your slides.
 - Images that have something personal about them/help tell a story can work particularly well.
- **Multimedia.** As well as striking images, other media elements such as animations and sound recordings can add an engaging extra element.
- **Vocal delivery.** If you are targeting an audience who do not have a pre-existing interest in your topic it can be more challenging to hold their attention. Consider practising with someone you trust and asking for constructive feedback on your delivery speed, clarity of speech, volume, and modulation.
- **How to introduce interactive elements into talks.** If your event is a talk, you can make audience members feel included by adding some interactive elements, for example a poll or a show of hands. This can feel more engaging than relying on a Q&A as the only interactive element.
 - There are plenty of tools that can help you, e.g., Menti polls and "Kahoot!" quizzes.
 - Consider answering questions regularly throughout the event rather than leaving them all to a Q&A at the end.
- **Ensure you are familiar with any necessary technology,** particularly if you are using an unfamiliar venue, or technology you or your partners have not used before.
- **Have a trial run.** This will give you confidence on the day and help to check how long your event might run for and manage that accordingly!
- **Have a helper on the day.** For example, at online events if there is one main presenter, then it is very useful to have someone else there too keeping an eye on any messages in the chat and responding to these, either by replying or by chipping in to flag anything to the main presenter that they may not have seen that it would be useful for them to immediately be aware of.

For events that go beyond talks, relevant training can be extremely valuable (for example in facilitation skills).

Useful resources include:

- **The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE)** (<https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/>) provides lots of useful online resources and training opportunities (<https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/engagement-training>).
- **UWE Bristol Science Communication Unit** runs professional and short courses (<https://www.uwe.ac.uk/research/centres-and-groups/scu/courses-and-training/professional-and-short-courses>), such as “Science Communication Building Blocks” (<https://courses.uwe.ac.uk/Z51000113/science-communication-building-blocks#about>), and free online practitioner guides ([Courses and training at the Science Communication Unit \(SCU\) - Science Communication Unit | UWE Bristol](#)). A lot of the principles are useful whatever your subject area.
- There are some useful **TED-branded YouTube videos** on public speaking that can help when designing talks for non-academic audiences, e.g. “TED’s secret to great public speaking” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FOCpMAww28>).

Publicising your event

Responsibility for publicising events sits with partner institutions, not with ESRC. Event leaders are responsible for supporting their institution to promote their event. Depending on the level of resource your institution can provide, you may need to take the lead on your event’s publicity.

Consider the most appropriate opportunities in your area to promote your event to your specific target group. If you are working with a non-academic partner, seek their views and explore whether you can use their communications channels. Other options include:

- local events listings
- local media
- community blogs
- arts centres, community centres and libraries
- community groups (particularly those with a link to the event topic)
- science café networks (depending on the research area)
- university external contacts such as alumni databases and newsletters
- sixth forms and FE colleges (students considering university entry may be interested in events not specifically aimed at schools)
- u3a networks and retirement groups
- colleagues with strong social media networks beyond academia.

Listing your event on the festival website

Details of all events must be provided for the festival website (<https://festivalofsocialscience.com/>), including completing all mandatory fields. For all events, a link to a live booking system or process must be provided e.g. Eventbrite or other external booking platform or your local institutional booking process.

Please ensure that the content you provide to your festival team for the website about your event describes it as accurately as possible, so that potential attendees know what is on offer.

- Make sure that how you write about your event in the event listing and how you tag it precisely matches the audience you design and run your event for.

- For events that include multiple elements (for example a talk, a film, and a Q&A), ensure it is clear which is the main event. For example, if a performance or craft activity is on offer but constitutes only 10 minutes of a 2-hour event, make this clear.
- Ensure it is clear who each event is aimed at, especially those that are open to all but targeted predominantly at a particular group.
- Include when booking closes (for events you need to book for in advance). If you need to book in advance, can you do so right up till the time that the event starts or is there a cut-off point, e.g. 24 hours before the event start, a week before the event starts, 5pm on the day before the event?

Referencing ESRC

When promoting your event:

- **Please use the festival flag logo and ESRC logo** on all your content, promotions, bookings page and materials relating to the festival. Please ensure that the ESRC logo used is the current one, not the old (white on navy) one.
 - You can re-use any promotional items you have from previous years as long as these logos are included.
- We encourage you to use this year's festival graphic where appropriate.
- Your institution's festival team will be able to provide you with the festival flag logo and festival graphics.
- Please use the ESRC festival hashtag **#ESRCFestival** on social media (X if used or BlueSky) (and, where appropriate, attendees) and tag in **@ESRC** on LinkedIn posts.
- Please promote the festival website (<https://festivalofsocialscience.com/>) anywhere where your own events are promoted.

On the day:

- If you are running an online event and/or using slides, please include the current ESRC logo, festival flag logo and festival graphic in a prominent manner, for example on an introductory slide.
 - Your institution's festival team will be able to provide you with a festival intro slide and Zoom/Teams backgrounds that you can use for this purpose if you wish, or you may choose to incorporate the above elements in an alternative manner.
- For other types of events, please include the ESRC logo, festival flag logo and festival graphic somewhere in your materials if it is practical to do so.
- Please mention at the start of your event that it is part of the Festival of Social Science, funded by ESRC.
 - For 'drop in' events with no fixed start time, please include this somewhere in your materials if possible.
- Please reference the evaluation survey at the start or end of your event so that attendees know to look out for it.
- If appropriate, please flag the festival website so attendees can look for other events they might like to attend.
- It's OK to omit the above points if you are working with a target group to whom you feel the information would be confusing or meaningless, for example a class of young children.

Factoring in evaluation requirements

Full details of evaluation requirements will be provided separately. As an overview, there will be post-event data to collect from event participants (except from under-16s), any schools or non-academic organisations who collaborated on the event, and yourself as event leader. This is to enable ESRC to evaluate events across the festival as a whole. Event leaders may also include any other evaluation elements they wish.

- To encourage responses, you could:
 - Create a QR code linking to the online evaluation survey and include this on any materials you have available at the event.
 - If an online event, post a link to the online evaluation survey in the chat before you finish.
 - Include a reminder about the post-event survey and the link to the online survey in a 'thanks for attending' email the following day.
- Please count the number of attendees at an event. Please count the number of children (under 16) and report separately from the number of adults.

Participation in the festival evaluation is a **mandatory** requirement of the festival and your data should be returned to your institution festival lead as soon as possible after your event.

Hints and tips for online events

Which platform to use

- If using a video-conferencing platform for adult audiences, we suggest using either Zoom (as many of the public will already be familiar with it) or specifically looking into what is most popular with your target audience (see below).
- If using a video-conferencing platform for young audiences, it is worth consulting with a partner organisation before choosing. For example, many schools use Teams or Google Classroom, in which case Teams or Google Meet offer a familiar option.

Tech tips

- To avoid technical issues on the day, make time to prepare and practice.
 - Do you know how to make sure you are in presenter mode for virtual events (and how this differs depending on the platform and the number of screens you are using)?
 - Check the settings to ensure that when attendees join, they are muted as default to avoid unintentional interruptions from delegates.
 - Always consider accessibility requirements for online events in advance – e.g., ensuring that live transcription is enabled *before* the event starts.
 - Check how to record an event and ensure attendees are made aware if this is your intention. This can be a great way to share the event with anyone who missed it (you may wish to edit to remove any unnecessary chat or housekeeping etc).

Virtual backgrounds

- Consider in advance whether you want to use a virtual background for an online event.
 - There will be a festival-branded virtual background available if you wish to use it.
 - If there are several presenters at your virtual event, you may wish to coordinate your approach.

- A well-chosen background can go beyond concealing clutter. For example, one previous event featured four speakers from different parts of the UK, who each had as their Zoom background an attractive photo of their city.

Replicating the positives from in-person events

- Remember to introduce yourselves and inform delegates of the format of the event, how long it will run for, etiquette for asking questions and how to do this (do not assume everyone is familiar with your technology) etc.
- A previous festival event finished on time, but the event leaders stayed on in case anyone had extra questions they would like to ask/things they would like to say to them. This nicely mirrored a live event, where people will expect to be able to leave at the finish time without feeling bad, but some people may want to hang on afterwards to speak to the presenters 1:1.