



## Festival of Social Science 2026 – Festival Pack

#ESRCFestival 17<sup>th</sup> October – 7<sup>th</sup> November

### Overview

We are looking forward to supporting you as you plan the programme of events you will be running for FoSS 2026. We hope you find the information in this pack helpful and please get in touch if after reading it there is anything of which you are not sure.

This pack is written for festival team members at our partner institutions with information relating to overseeing your institution's festival. We are providing a separate event pack which relates to planning and running individual festival events. Please ensure that this is provided to all event leaders and make sure you are familiar with it yourself.

### Aims of FoSS 2026

#### **General**

- UK-wide festival
- A strong web and social media presence highlighting ESRC's and economic/social science insights.

#### **Target audience**

- ESRC aims for the 2026 festival to **increase its reach with public and youth audiences**, and to ensure that events listed as being for these audiences are genuinely tailored to them and engaging for attendees.
- We encourage you 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 such as policymakers, professionals, businesses, or third-sector organisations.

#### **Theme**

- The theme for this year will be **Money, Finance and the Cost of Living**
- Please see the separate **Theme briefing document** with a more detail exploration of the following points:
  - Personal finances
  - Teaching children about money
  - Understanding and support for the cost of living crisis
  - The economy and how it works
  - How businesses make money
  - Starting your own business
- The focus of the festival is on meaningful public engagement. As such, we encourage events tailored at specific "publics" (groups defined by a particular interest, identity, location, demographic or other characteristics) for which a particular motivation or need for an event on this topic by this "public" is identified from the outset.
- ESRC's target is for **at least 25% of events across the festival as a whole to** be on 'our working lives' theme.

- We appreciate that not all partner institutions will have enough relevant researchers who are interested in taking part in the festival to reach 25%, so please do not worry if this is the case for you.
- You are not limited to the festival theme and your institution's other festival events can be on any economics/social science topics likely to be of interest to the target audiences for which they are designed.

The festival will run from **17th October – 7th November 2026**

***More broadly, the Festival of Social Science objectives are to:***

- Encourage, support, and create opportunities for social science researchers to engage with public and young people audiences.
- Promote and increase awareness of the social sciences and ESRC-funded research.
- Promote and increase awareness of the contribution social science makes to the wellbeing and the economy of society in the UK.
- Enable the public to engage with social science research.
- Engage with teachers and young people and to raise their awareness of the social sciences.

**What do we mean by 'public and youth audiences' and 'other non-academic groups'?**

- 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 in 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 to consider which particular segment of the 'public' each event should focus on and why, and tailor accordingly. The NCCPE has a useful guide to ['Who are the public?'](#)

**Festival dates**

The 2026 festival will run **Saturday 17th October – 7th November 2026**

- These will be the dates for the festival overall; however, there is no obligation for partners to run events over the entire period. You can choose to compress all events at your institution into a shorter period within these dates (e.g. one week) if you wish.

**Contact details**

**Festival manager**

- Cheryl Harris
- Email: [fossmanager@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:fossmanager@leeds.ac.uk)

- Responsible for festival coordination, day-to-day communication with and tracking progress by festival partner leads, the festival website and evaluation coordination. Any queries regarding the festival to be sent to the festival manager.

#### **ESRC public engagement lead**

- Danielle Moore-Chick
- Email: [danielle.moore-chick@esrc.ukri.org](mailto:danielle.moore-chick@esrc.ukri.org)
- Responsible for festival oversight and strategy; main festival contact at ESRC.

#### **Number of events per institution**

There is no requirement for each participating institution to hold a set number of events. It is fine if you wish to put more resource into a smaller number of events. In previous years, most partners have run between 5-20 events, with a handful running fewer than five or more than twenty.

#### **Target number of attendees per event**

ESRC is not setting a target number of attendees per event. We *will* be asking for data on attendee numbers as part of the festival evaluation and are keen to see strong attendance overall, but do not wish to exclude great events with small groups. In particular:

- Participatory events are very welcome, and attendance numbers should be limited to what is practical and will ensure a good experience for attendees.
- We welcome events that aim to broaden the reach of the festival and attract attendees who might not normally attend a research-based or cultural event. We appreciate that such events may not attract large numbers, but that engaging with a small group of harder-to-reach attendees is a success in itself.

#### **Event types and format (online/in person)**

- All event types are welcome – talks, exhibitions, quizzes, performances, craft activities, debates, pop-up stalls...
- Events can be in person, online or hybrid.
- To help increase our reach with public and youth audiences, we encourage partners to consider running at least one event that members of the public can ‘stumble upon’ and join in without pre-booking, for example in a busy public space.
- 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.

#### **Budget**

- ESRC IAAs are expected to ring-fence £10,000 of their annual IAA budget for the festival.
- ESRC IAAs who successfully applied for a grant uplift to support a non-IAA partner to participate in the festival, and have confirmed the continuation of this partnership, will receive a £5,000 uplift per non-IAA partner.

#### **Costs**

- Festival costs should follow the same rules as your overall IAA agreement in terms of what does and does not class as eligible costs.
- All partners should also follow your own institutional policies regarding eligible costs.
- Costs must be non-FEC (Full Economic Costing).

- Costs supporting capacity building, external support, transport to events where needed for those who might otherwise be unable to attend (for example bus hire for schools or transport costs for those from low-income backgrounds), and any type of engagement activities that directly support the festival objectives are acceptable.

The following costs are not supported:

- **Salaried staff costs.** However, we can pay hourly invoiceable/'timesheet' type costs, provided that an auditable trail is kept that shows why the costs are justifiable in terms of creating value for the public. \*
- **Alcohol, and substantial food and beverage offerings.** However, light refreshments such as tea, coffee, juice, and biscuits can be covered, as can costs for appropriate sustenance for volunteers. Up to date details of the maximum amounts that can be spent per person can be found [in Annex B of the UKRI business expense claims, business travel and subsistence policy](#).
- **Goody bags (for example containing promotional and/or novelty items) or substantial giveaways.** However, modest value items where appropriate, such as prizes for a young people's competition, or materials to allow event attendees to continue an activity at home, are OK.
- **Travel costs for international speakers/participants.** Travel costs for international speakers/participants are not permitted from the festival budget (please note the change from previous years).
- **Accommodation costs** only under exceptional circumstances. You will need to make a short case to the Festival Manager and have this approved. See FAQs for more detail.

Please also consult with the Festival Manager if an event leader requests other substantial costs relating to securing a speaker/participant not covered by the above.

#### \*Payments for an individual's time

Examples of acceptable payments for an individual's time include (but are not limited to):

- Paying someone for whom presenting is their career, e.g. a specialist STEM presenter to run a children's event.
- Honorariums.
- Paying a student/postgrad for their time (e.g. a £100 payment or a book token), in return for helping out with a task relating to an event.
- Paying a freelancer to create a brochure or digital resource.

#### \*\*Food and drink

Examples of acceptable food and beverage costs:

- Hot or cold non-alcoholic drinks for participants, event leaders or volunteers.
- Small snack items e.g. biscuits or fruit for participants, event leaders or volunteers.
- A light lunch e.g. sandwiches, crisps and fruit, for event leaders or volunteers (*not* participants) **IF** they are working all day at event and there's no practical alternative.

Examples of food and beverage costs that aren't permitted:

- Meals for event participants (including those provided as takeaways or buffets, e.g. pizzas, buffets of snack foods).
- Meals for event leaders or volunteers before or after events.

#### Underspend on the festival

If you underspent on your festival in 2025, it is OK for you to roll over this spend to the 2026 festival (unless the underspend is on a grant uplift to support a non-IAA partner, and the partnership does not continue into 2026).

Festival budget underspend cannot be spent on non-festival activities.

### **Event details for the website**

Details of all events must be provided for the festival website (<https://festivalofsocialscience.com/>), including completing all mandatory fields, in the format and to the timescales set out by the festival manager. This includes information for those 'closed' events that are being run purely for members of a particular group and are only open to its members, e.g. in partnership with a specific school or community group. This is so that we have the data for reporting purposes for **all** events ('closed' events will not display to the public on the website). For all live bookable events, a link to a booking system or process must be provided (e.g. Eventbrite or other booking platforms or your local institutional booking process). If attendees do not need to pre-book and can simply turn up, instructions should be included in the 'how to book' field.

### **Publicising events**

Responsibility for publicising events lies with individual festival partners. Please explore relevant channels such as local media and networks, along with any more specialist groups/networks/media of relevance to individual events, so that the relevant target groups will find them. We encourage you to seek support where available from your institution's media/comms team. Suggestions 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
- individual staff members with strong social media networks beyond academia.

Festival partner leads should liaise with event leaders to ensure that the content of each event is described as accurately as possible, so that potential attendees know what is on offer.

- 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. Further guidance and examples are available on the festival Expression of Interest form available from the festival manager ([fossmanager@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:fossmanager@leeds.ac.uk)).

With regard to branding and promotion of the festival as a whole:

- The festival manager will provide you with all the relevant graphics for use on your promotional items.
- There will be a new website banner graphic design created each year in line with the festival theme, which we encourage you to use on your own website, and elsewhere if appropriate.

- Please use the festival flag logo and ESRC logo on all your content, promotions and materials relating to the festival. You can re-use any promotional items from previous years as long as these logos are included.
- Please promote the festival website (<https://festivalofsocialscience.com/>) anywhere where your own events are promoted.
- 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.

Full details of communications support from UKRI, along with branding requirements and how to reference the festival and ESRC in your own press releases and other communications, will be issued separately by UKRI. NB UKRI will not need to sign these off but would appreciate being sent copies of press releases before they are issued.

### **Briefings and training**

Event leaders will be provided with training on public engagement/running a festival event. These will be arranged by the festival manager; details of the sessions will be provided once they are available. All event leads should attend these sessions. Festival leads are welcome to sign up to attend the sessions.

### **Evaluation overview**

We are keen to support you with your events and showcasing the best of social science in 2026 and beyond. Increasingly we need evidence to demonstrate the impact that investments such as the Festival of Social Science have, and endeavour to do so via event evaluation.

The festival manager will be co-ordinating the collection and submission of festival data and evaluation reporting to ESRC. **All** participating institutions will need to submit the required details/completed templates to the festival manager.

Full details of reporting requirements, including evaluation questionnaires, and the process to be followed will be provided closer to the festival. Mandatory data to be supplied by all participating institutions will include:

- Facts and figures relating to:
  - Attendee numbers (pre-registered and actual) and attendee demographics
  - Numbers of events by different categories (e.g., by topic, audience, in person v online or hybrid) \*
  - Geographical location of events\*
  - Any non-academic event partner organisations (e.g., community groups, charities) \*
- Views and opinions, including:
  - Attendee views and experiences
  - Teacher views of schools' events
  - Views of any event partner organisations
  - Speaker/event leader views (if/how festival participation has benefitted them)
  - Festival partner institution views (benefit to their institution of participating in festival)

*\*So long as you have provided the data for the website, this will be extracted from the website by the festival manager.*

### **Information to be provided by the festival manager separate to this festival pack**

- Event leader pack
- Expression of interest template
- Event data requirements for the website
- Evaluation process, evaluation questionnaires and reporting requirements including deadline for submission
- Job descriptions – festival lead, event leader, festival sponsor and festival manager – and RACI matrix
- ESRC and UKRI roles
- Branding requirements and how to reference the festival and ESRC in your own press releases and other communication.