



Being Human Festival

Being Human Festival FAQs

Key information

Who leads Being Human Festival?

Being Human is run by a team based at the School of Advanced Study, University of London (SAS) – the UK’s national centre for the promotion and support of humanities research. The festival runs in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the British Academy (BA), two of the largest public bodies dedicated to supporting humanities research and researchers in the UK. Along with SAS, these partners fund the festival and provide support and consultation. The Public Engagement team at SAS undertake all the central management and promotion of Being Human, and it is this team that you will be in touch with if you take part in the festival.

What are your definitions of ‘humanities research’?

The festival uses a broad definition of the humanities, which encompasses the subject areas traditionally associated with the study of the human world. This includes, for example, art history, archaeology, classics, cultural studies, history, film, languages, law, literature, musicology, philosophy, theatre studies, theology, etc.

Our model is ‘humanities plus’: providing the event has a strong humanities research presence, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary events are more than welcome. Projects with artists, practitioners, social scientists, natural scientists, or any other researchers are very welcome as long as they offer a good fit with the festival’s objectives.

How is the festival evaluated?

The festival is evaluated annually and independently by an external company using data gathered by organisers across the country. All organisers are expected to take part in the festival evaluation in order to ensure that the festival continues to improve and to fulfil its funding criteria. All evaluation reports on the festival from 2014 onwards are available on our website.

Applying

I've missed the application deadline. Can I still take part?

If you are applying for funding, there is unfortunately no flexibility around our deadlines. However, if you have a high-quality event or activity that does not require financial support, there is a later application deadline, and we are occasionally prepared to look at submissions even beyond that for activities to be included in our online listings. Please note, however, that consideration of late activities is entirely at the discretion of the festival team, and there is no guarantee that late submissions will be considered.

I am not based in the UK. Can I apply to take part?

Being Human is primarily a UK-based festival, and funding is currently only available to support activities in the UK. However, each year we do include a number of international activities in the programme that fit the festival's ethos and can run without direct financial support. You can find out more about the festival's international presence [here](#). If you are based in the US, please contact the National Humanities Center to find out more about Being Human Festival US. If you are not based in the UK or the US but have an idea for a strong activity that you think matches the festival's aims, please get in touch.

If my application for funding is unsuccessful, will I be considered for another festival pathway?

Yes, if an application is unsuccessful the review panel will consider whether it might be possible for an iteration of the activity to take place under a different pathway. Applicants do not need to submit multiple applications for the same activity if they wish it to be considered for other pathways, this will be done automatically by the review panel.

For example, if an Institutional Grant application is unsuccessful, the panel will consider whether the nominated individual event from the Institutional Grant application form could be offered funding via the Festival Event Grant pathway.

If a funding application is unsuccessful, the review panel will consider whether it could take place in the festival on an unfunded basis.

The Being Human team will get in touch with applicants to discuss whether it would be possible for the activities to happen under a different pathway. They may ask for revised information based on this change as, if an activity moves from a funded to an unfunded pathway, we appreciate it may need to happen in a smaller fashion. The team will be on hand to discuss this process. Please note that if an application does not meet Being Human's eligibility criteria there is no guarantee it will be accepted into the festival.

Can I or my organisation submit multiple applications for funding?

There is no rule against organisations submitting multiple applications for funding. However, Being Human does have limited funding which it needs to spread across organisations in the UK. We would therefore recommend trying to find out if other applications are being submitted in your organisation and if there is an opportunity to collaborate, or to apply for an Institutional Grant if there is widespread interest.

It is highly unlikely that two applications from the same individual would be accepted for the festival, and we advise against this. Instead, we suggest focusing efforts on making an application for one strong activity or a series based around a central theme.

Do you need a letter of support from partners for applications via all pathways, or only those involving funding from the festival?

We require a letter of support from any partner organisations named on applications across all pathways.

Can I use my own or my organisation's own budget template for grant applications?

No, all grant applications must use our budget template to be eligible for funding. Templates can be found [here](#).

Taking part

What support is provided for organisers?

In addition to providing a limited number of funding grants, Being Human is committed to supporting everyone taking part in the festival. The festival team offer advice and guidance to organisers and make resources available to give activities the best possible chance of success.

Specifically, we provide the following:

- a training programme run throughout the festival year for practical advice with designing, planning, promotion and delivery of your project;
- public engagement toolkits, resources and helpful advice from the festival team;
- guides to promoting your event that contain hints and tips about marketing and press;
- copies of Being Human print and digital materials geared towards promoting the national festival and access to other marketing materials to promote your activity;

- templates you can use to produce your own marketing materials (posters, banners, digital and PowerPoint templates etc.); and,
- support from the central Being Human social media accounts.

Being Human organisers may also be invited to take part in centrally organised festival activities such as the festival launch event

What will I get out of organising a Being Human activity?

Organising a Being Human activity can be challenging, but organisers (as shown in our festival evaluations) typically find the process rewarding. The main benefits that people have identified include finding that the festival has:

- acted as a catalyst to get a project up and running which wouldn't otherwise have happened;
- acted as an opportunity to engage with a new audience and get refreshing new perspectives on research;
- provided an opportunity to get public engagement advice and support that is not available at their own institution;
- offered an opportunity to work with new cultural partners or develop an existing relationship;
- provided opportunities to make contacts and start collaborations with other researchers nationally;
- provided an opportunity to raise visibility of their research nationally and within their own institution.

Further examples can be found in the [case studies](#) section of our website.

I've received funding from the festival, how do I claim the grant?

If you have received an offer of funding from the festival, we will issue a Purchase Order to the finance contact named on your application confirming the amount, which should then be claimed back by invoicing us **after delivery** of the festival activity. Activity costs should be covered by your own university in the interim. If events are postponed or cancelled, we may be in touch with you to ask you for the revised costs of your activity. If you haven't taken part in the festival before you may need to complete a form so that your institution can be added to our system. The deadline for all invoices is **27 February 2026**.

Eligibility

What do you mean by 'Higher Education Institution'? And why are they important?

Being Human Festival's core mission is to make publicly funded research accessible to as wide an array of UK publics as possible. Therefore, it is vital that

all activities *funded by the festival* showcase research that has been carried out at a publicly funded Higher Education Institution (as recognised by [HESA](#), the Higher Education Statistics Agency) or an [AHRC recognised IRO \(Independent Research Organisation\)](#).

Whilst community and cultural partners and other collaborators can often be vital parts of public engagement work, we expect projects and initiatives that are funded by the festival (via an Institutional Grant or Festival Event Grant) to be primarily led, planned and delivered by staff and professional researchers at a Higher Education Institution or an AHRC-recognised IRO. Festival grants can only be processed via a Higher Education Institution or an IRO and cannot be claimed by an individual researcher or other organisation.

Our Festival Event pathway offers a great way to get involved in the festival for anyone with a connection to humanities research, including universities, museums, archives, galleries, publishers, subject associations, societies, libraries and more. However, please note that all Being Human Festival events should involve a professional humanities researcher in the delivery of the event.

What do you mean by ‘professional researcher’? (and why does every event need to have one?)

Being Human Festival fosters connections to publicly funded research in the humanities. We want to demystify humanities research and make it clearer to everyone what it is, who does it, why it is relevant and who it is for. It’s therefore central to our mission that publics across the country can encounter and speak to professional researchers in the humanities at our events. We include in our definition university lecturers and researchers (at any career stage), curators and research librarians.

Whilst we very much welcome participation in events from students, creative practitioners, independent scholars, local history groups and citizen researchers, it is important that these perspectives are included in addition to, rather than as a replacement for, professional researchers of the kind outlined above.

Can PhD researchers apply to the festival?

Every Institutional Grant application needs to include one activity led by a PhD researcher, supported by and in collaboration with at least one professional researcher from their institution.

PhD researchers are not eligible to apply for the Festival Event Grant pathway.

PhD researchers can apply to organise an event via our Festival Event pathway, but these must be collaborative applications featuring an eligible professional

researcher (see definition above). In all instances, we will require a letter of support from the PhD student's supervisor at their institution.

Unfortunately, Masters students are not eligible to apply to the festival.

Do applicants have to be affiliated with a university or research organisation?

All Being Human Festival events should involve a professional humanities researcher, affiliated with an eligible HEI or research organisation, in both the planning and delivery of the event.

Funding applications will only be accepted from an eligible HEI or AHRC-recognised Independent Research Organisation.

Can I charge an entry fee for my Being Human event?

No, all activities featured in the festival need to be completely free to attend (please note that all activities need to be free, not just those funded by Being Human). This includes free access to venues where events are being held (such as heritage sites or museums that charge an entrance fee). This policy supports the festival's ethos of making humanities research accessible to the broadest possible audience.

It is also important that we do not create barriers to participation by asking attendees to use items around the home for online workshops. Assumptions should not be made about materials and equipment people will have available. Instead, items should either be sent in the post by the organiser or activities should require very little to participate.

Developing an event

What do you mean by 'public engagement'?

All the events in our programme offer some form of public engagement with humanities research. This means, essentially, that they take specialist knowledge in the humanities (in classics or philosophy, for example) and share it in ways that have been specifically designed to be appealing and engaging for a non-specialist audience. This means shaping the activity so that it appeals to an audience's needs, interests and enthusiasms. At their best, such activities are mutually beneficial both for researchers and for the public – establishing a 'two-way street' model of engagement.

How do I interest a public audience in my research?

A more useful way to think about this might be: 'how might my research align with an audience's existing interests and enthusiasms?' It is very unlikely that you will develop an audience entirely from scratch or persuade people to be

interested in something they have previously shown no inclination towards. It is more realistic to connect your research to something people are already passionate about and spend their leisure time doing. Does your research touch on an area in which there is strong existing public interest (e.g., sport, food and drink, music, literature, film, theatre, etc.)? Can it be matched to a format that people will find fun and engaging? Can you engage with existing fan communities, clubs, or societies? Remember that non-specialist audiences typically don't find highly specialised talks and lectures rewarding in the same way that fellow specialists do. Don't forget about the importance of how you promote your event, also – see more in the section below, 'Promoting an event'.

What do you mean by a 'public' or 'non-specialist' audience?

Our definition of a non-specialist, public audience (at whom all festival activities should be aimed) is an audience who do not have a current, formal relationship with a Higher Education Institution (HEI) or Independent Research Organisation (IRO) (e.g., staff or students at a university), and who do not have 'specialist' knowledge of a humanities research area. Audiences may have no prior interest in the humanities or may have an existing interest in an aspect of humanities research. Whilst your audience might be interested in history on the level of going to museums or watching TV documentaries, for example, they would not typically have an advanced knowledge of the latest research and innovations in the field of historical research.

Do events need to be open to the public?

The majority of festival events are open to the public. However, we do include a small number of closed activities that are targeted at schools and closed community groups where there is a good reason to do so.

Is there a Being Human Festival ethics approval process?

Being Human does not have its own ethics approval process. We would expect that events and activities meet the ethics approval process of their own/host institution. If events are addressing sensitive topics, we will ask how this will be appropriately handled, and there is a section covering this in the application form.

Why is a cultural/community partner important?

Choosing the right partner can be crucial to an activity's success, so it is important to think about this carefully. Examples of partners could include an arts organisation, museums and galleries (including university-run museums), collectives, community organisations, libraries and archives. Cultural partners could also be, for example, a local craft or writers' group.

When thinking of approaching partners to collaborate with, we recommend:

- selecting partners who really add value to events or make meaningful contributions (e.g., allowing you to engage with new audiences and communities)
- using partners' connections and networks to promote events, but not relying on them to do all the work
- creating genuine partnerships that allow for co-production, rather than simply using venues for marketing/venue purposes.

The most successful partnerships are fair and equitable, and generate mutual benefit for all concerned. This is often achieved by involving partners in the planning of an activity from an early stage (for example, offering them a place on planning committees) rather than by simply relying on them to supply a venue.

Can Being Human help me find a partner to work with?

Unfortunately, we cannot help to match-make applicants with potential partners. Details of organisations who have participated in previous years can be found by looking through our programmes ([available here](#)) or by talking to peers who have participated before.

If you work at a university, it is worth bearing in mind that your organisation may already have established community partners for off-campus/off-site events even if you have not worked with them before. It may be worth exploring options with colleagues in public engagement, widening participation, outreach or other relevant departments within your organisation to see if they can help.

If you are looking for a professional researcher to work with, we recommend looking online at the research profiles of those who are conducting relevant research at an organisation of interest/near to you. Professional researchers often have their email addresses listed on their profile page and you can get in touch with them to explore the possibilities of collaborating. It may also be worth speaking with peers to see if they have worked with someone before who would be suitable.

What do you mean by 'hybrid' event?

A hybrid event makes the most of both online and in-person delivery. This might mean, for example, that an event is presented to a small audience in-person and is also live streamed. It could mean a project that has both in-person, physical elements as well as digital/online experiences – for instance, a materials kit that is posted out to participants ahead of an online workshop, or a community based public art installation that also has a website where audiences can engage and share their ideas. We encourage organisers to think creatively about how to make online events as interactive and engaging as possible, to enable effective two-way engagement.

All hybrid events should have a suitable set up and be tailored to the audience's needs.

What do you mean by 'mutual benefit'?

Mutual benefit is a process and result where everyone (including researchers, cultural/community partners, and audience members) benefits from being involved in a project, activity or event, and enables both (or all) parties to achieve their aims or objectives. Find out more about mutual benefit in our ['Working with a partner' toolkit](#) and our ['Focusing on your audience' toolkit](#).

What do you mean by 'co-production'?

Co-production is a deliberative process, putting the researcher(s), cultural/community partner(s) and the public on equal footing throughout every stage of the design and delivery of a project or event. Find out more about co-production in our ['Working with a partner' toolkit](#).

Does Being Human have a central venue or physical festival site where I can do my activity?

No. Being Human is a place-based festival that happens in cities and towns across the UK. Individual organisers are responsible for finding an appropriate venue that will fit with their activity's format and target audience. Part of the assessment criteria for taking part in Being Human is choosing a venue that is appropriate for the suggested public engagement activity. For help with picking a suitable space you can read our toolkit on ['Finding the right venue'](#).

Promoting an event

When do I need to start promoting my festival event?

You should start promoting and taking bookings for your event around 6 weeks before, and when the whole festival programme launches in early October. Please refrain from promoting your event before this point. When we all start promoting at the same time it helps to raise the visibility of the festival and create a bigger 'splash'. We also want to avoid events becoming fully booked by the time that the festival programme is officially launched.

How does ticketing and booking work?

We provide a central platform on our website that lists every event that is part of the festival. This system does not have the capacity to manage bookings. If your event requires booking, we recommend that you set up a listing on your institution or venue's own booking system. You will need to include any relevant booking links when you upload your event copy in the summer. Please see our 'promoting your event' guide for further information.

Please note, Eventbrite now charges for setting up free events with over 25 tickets.

Will Being Human promote my activity?

Being Human promotes the festival as a whole in the media, on social media, and by producing a central online programme and promotional materials. We also produce materials to help organisers promote activities locally. Please note however, that as a national festival taking place in multiple locations across the UK, we are limited in the amount of central marketing support that we can give to individual organisers and events. To make the most of participating in the festival, it is therefore essential that all organisers think carefully about the likely appeal of an activity to the specific audience that they are trying to connect with, how best to reach that audience using the resources available, and how to manage time effectively in order to properly promote an activity. Ultimately, activities will only succeed if organisers take responsibility for promoting them themselves.

Can Being Human get my research/festival activity media coverage?

We can't guarantee that being part of the festival will result in you receiving media interest in your festival activity or your research. However, we do work hard to maximise the visibility of all activities and provide training and support to help organisers stand the best possible chance of securing media attention for themselves (for example, by providing template press releases). Some examples of previous media coverage garnered by the festival are [available on our website](#). Whilst there is no hard-and-fast formula to guarantee media interest, the press is typically more interested in activities that: shed genuinely new light on topics *already* in the news; that are particularly unusual and innovative in their format; or that unveil new and exciting research discoveries.

How can I make sure my activity reaches a significant number of people?

We are obviously keen that the festival reaches the largest possible audience, and that each separate activity makes as much impact as possible. This is particularly important for activities supported by grants from the festival but is good practice across the board. Whilst we recognise that some activities may have good reason to limit capacity, there are sometimes ways around this. For example, very small walking tours or workshops might run several times, or an event that was conceived as a one-off performance might be supplemented by spin-off activities such as school workshops. An activity that is ambitious and 'risky' might be supplemented with an activity that has a guaranteed audience (e.g., a walk-up stall in a space with a high footfall).

My event is not booking up – what do I do?

Our 'Promoting your activity' guide and 'Working with the press and media guide' contain further hints and tips on how to raise public awareness of your activities. The best general approach is to think carefully about who your intended audience is and what the best ways to reach out to them will be. Some tips include:

- Make good use of partners' and venues' mailing lists and social media and ask them to promote your activity to their networks.
- Create posters and flyers and distribute in places likely to be seen by your target audience.
- Add your events to local listings and 'what's on' sites/bulletin boards likely to be seen by your target audiences.
- Start a word of mouth 'snowball'. Send direct emails inviting people to the activity and ask them to spread the word.

My activity is nearing capacity. Should I overbook?

Yes! As your event is free, we strongly recommend that you overbook by at least 30%, rising to 50% in London. This is based on feedback from organisers over the years of running Being Human Festival who have reported high drop-off rates for free activities. Drop-off for online events is a little more difficult to predict. We still recommend that you overbook by at least 30%.

What if too many people turn up?

This is unlikely for free events. However, if you are holding an in-person event we recommend incorporating similar wording to the below into your booking or reminder emails: *'As Being Human Festival events are free, not everyone who asks for tickets comes to our events. To make sure we have a full house we allocate more tickets than there are seats. Admission is on a first come, first served basis, so please arrive in good time for the start of the event.'*

For online events, make sure you check the capacity limit for your chosen platform and account and plan accordingly. We recommend opening the online 'waiting room' early and asking people to make sure they join in good time.

What else can I do?

We recommend emailing attendees 48 hours before the event to remind them of their booking and remind them to release tickets if they are no longer able to attend. Spare tickets can then be re-allocated.

For 'in person' events, see what comes up when you search for your venue on Google maps and try to anticipate any potential issues with people finding you. We also strongly recommend that you think carefully about signage for your event to make sure that people can find your venue. Preferably do a dry run

with someone who is unfamiliar with the location/venue. Are there any obstacles? Is it 100% clear which entrance is the right one to use on larger buildings, for example? Have reception staff been briefed? A common complaint from potential attendees has been that they simply couldn't find the right room, and people will not search exhaustively for a free event!

If you are holding your event online make sure you send very clear instructions about how to access your online platform. Not everybody will be familiar with platforms like Zoom.