Being Human festival: 11–20 November 2021
Open Call application guidelines

Being Human festival 2021

Being Human festival returns in November 2021. Amidst continued uncertainty, we still aim to deliver a national celebration of the humanities that inspires people and shows the resilience, creativity and imagination in communities across the UK. To enable planning to begin, we are committing to a hybrid-delivery festival this November that combines the best of online engagement with safe in-person activities. Together we will build on the best elements of Being Human 2020 to offer a national festival of public engagement taking place both in-person and online.

Although digital delivery helped expand the festival’s horizons, it will continue to champion its core principles: Being Human remains a place-based festival that emphasises interaction, working with communities outside academia and those less typically engaged with humanities culture (people who might not normally go to a public university event, or an exhibition in an art gallery, for example). Whether digital, or in-person (socially distanced), we will support innovative, participatory, and creative activities that foster genuine, two-way connections with people not usually engaged with academic research. As ever, events should be designed to facilitate mutual learning between researchers and publics.

Our festival theme in 2021 is ‘Renewal,’ which can be used as broad inspiration for shaping events around research and will help promote connections within a very diverse programme. More on the theme can be found in the final section of this document.

We are especially interested in how humanities research might help us to ‘renew’ our understanding of what it means to be human in 2021, including our relationships with the places around us, how we work and play, how we understand identity and culture, and how we interact with the planet and nature.

Being Human festival is led by the School of Advanced Study at the University of London, in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the British Academy.

About the Open Call

The Open Call 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.
This route is all about well thought through activities that are relatively easy to organise and fun for all involved. Activities in this category can make use of existing resources, formats and platforms, while giving them a ‘Being Human festival’ twist. They run without a direct financial contribution from the festival (perhaps using institutional funding, resources from research grants etc.), but benefit from additional support and publicity from being part of the festival.

Activities of this kind form a large part of the festival programme. By submitting an event to the only national festival of the humanities, you are helping to make sure access to research continues to thrive and grow, as well as raising awareness about why the humanities are so important to our everyday lives. We also hope taking part in the festival will be fun and rewarding, offering the opportunity to share your work with new and diverse audiences.

What support is available?

Being Human is committed to supporting everyone taking part in the festival. The festival team offer advice and guidance to all organisers and make resources available to help give activities the best possible chance of success.

Available support and resources include:

- a training “Masterclass” series 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 (e.g. banners and badges) to promote your activity;
- templates you can use to produce your own marketing materials (e.g. posters, banners, digital and PowerPoint templates etc.);
- support from the central Being Human social media accounts.

You may also be invited to take part in centrally organised festival activities such as the festival launch.

What formats are suitable?

Open Call activities typically make use of tried and tested formats that produce fun, impactful and easy to deliver activities, with a Being Human twist. The formats below are examples of types of activities that can still successfully run even in times of social distancing and other restrictions. We advise you to look at our planning toolkits that give tips on how to create a successful public engagement event. These include advice on socially distanced and hybrid online/in person activities.

Some examples of good formats that can run in person, online, or in hybrid forms include:
• performances (e.g. theatre, music, comedy, storytelling);
• food and drink (e.g. cookery lessons, themed meals, tastings);
• screenings and ‘watch together’ (e.g. film screenings with introductions, listening parties, DJ sessions);
• walks and tours (e.g. walks, audio walks, treasure hunts, behind the scenes tours);
• ‘have a go’ events (e.g. learn a skill, try an instrument, make something);
• (virtual) museum lates or museum takeovers exhibitions and installations; (e.g. outdoor art, public art, online exhibitions, crowd-sourced activity);
• interactive digital content (e.g. podcasts, films, animations);
• a special iteration of a recurring event (e.g. object handling or local history walks);
• activities coordinated by post or other ways of connecting with people at home;
• other interactive online or hybrid activities.

If you are unsure about where to start, or want a toolkit with guidance on an easy to achieve format, you might want to consider our Being Human Cafés format.

Whatever the format, it is important to remember that we are looking for ‘public engagement with research’ projects, not simply cultural activities or academic seminars/lectures. This means that audiences, communities and participants should have opportunities to contribute their own experiences and knowledge as part of the project. They should also come away having learnt something clear and understandable about new humanities research.

We do not include academic lectures, seminars or workshops in the Being Human programme. However, through the Open Call pathway we are open to proposals for public talks, so long as they are held off-campus, in venues/on platforms that are accessible and interesting to non-specialists. Talks should address interesting and relevant topics pitched at the right audiences and at the right level and include opportunities for interaction.

Are there any priorities?

We are particularly keen to receive applications which do one or more of the following things:

• explore innovative and realistic approaches to public engagement in the current challenging conditions;
• reach genuinely disengaged or under-served audiences (e.g. audiences in areas of high deprivation or low educational attainment, areas without a university or with a sharp ‘town/gown’ division);
• meaningfully engage with black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) audiences;
• meaningfully engage with families and younger audiences;
• give serious consideration to issues of accessibility in choice of venue/platform and format (including, importantly, accessibility for people with disabilities);
• are relevant to communities local to your institution (for example, place-based activity highlighting unexpected aspects of local history and/or contemporary culture, addressing topical debates with local communities);
• feature an element of co-production;
• have potential to make a small change happen locally and/or leave a legacy;
• respond in a topical way to our 2021 theme of ‘Renewal’.

What criteria are there for Open Call applications?

Open Call applications stand a good chance of being accepted into the festival programme. However, all events must meet the general eligibility criteria for taking part in the festival. They must:

• demonstrate aspects of humanities research in ways that are entertaining, accessible and relevant for non-specialist audiences;
• have direct involvement from a humanities researcher in delivering (not just planning) the activity, to ensure that research expertise informs the activity that audiences encounter;*
• be held during the festival dates;
• be free to attend (This includes free access to venues where events are being held, such as heritage sites or museums that charge an entrance fee);
• respond to the interests and needs of a clearly defined audience;
• be well thought through and achievable within the timeframe;
• be held off-campus wherever possible (excluding campus-based theatres etc.)
• consider issues around diversity in the speakers and researchers represented at events (e.g. in terms of gender, age, ethnic diversity);
• are held using accessible platforms/venues.

* See our FAQs for our definition of a professional researcher. This could mean simply inviting a university researcher to speak at an event.

What don’t we want?

Activities that are not suitable for the festival programme are ones that:

• have only a tenuous link to humanities research (see our FAQs for our definition);
• are unrepresentative, for example ‘about us without us’ type activity that addresses issues without directly including perspectives from people impacted by them;
• feature ‘non-diverse speaker line-ups such as ‘manels’;
• are not designed to appeal to a clearly defined non-specialist audience;
• make use of platforms, venues or formats that have not been carefully chosen, are inaccessible, or are unlikely to appeal to a public audience;
• are unlikely to fit in a public festival context (i.e. if subject matter highly sensitive or emotionally triggering);
• are over-ambitious and thus at high risk of failure;
• are deemed to be unlikely to succeed in the context of ongoing restrictions/uncertainty around Covid-19.

We also do not want to include any event that is similar in format to an academic seminar or workshop. Very long, discussion-based workshops are not popular with public audiences and we would class these as an ‘academic’ format.
Should I apply?

The Open Call is a great way to get involved in the Being Human festival if you have an idea or format that is good to go and fits in with the festival’s ethos. We would love to hear from you! The deadline for Open Call applications is Monday 28 June 2021. However, applications may be accepted and reviewed if submitted before this.

This year we are particularly keen to hear from people who want to get involved in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This includes big cities such as Edinburgh, Glasgow, Cardiff and Belfast – but also smaller cities, towns and rural areas.

Application process

The Open Call application form and activities grid is available on our website at www.beinghumanfestival.org/apply. Letters of support should be provided from any cultural and community partners named on your application. Applications should be made on the correct form and returned via email to: apply.beinghuman@sas.ac.uk.

- Monday 28 June (5pm) – Deadline for Open Call applications*
- By end July – Notification of outcome of applications

* Open Call applications may be reviewed in the lead up to this deadline so feel free to submit your proposal at any time before this date.

Further information about the festival and the level of support available when organising your activity can be found on the FAQs section of our website. If you have any questions, please email beinghuman@sas.ac.uk.

2021 festival theme: ‘Renewal’

The past twelve months have brought enormous challenges across the globe. The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular, have been world-changing and are far from over. Whilst we continue to live through a moment of unprecedented challenge, strain, and change, however, one thing is clear for many people: whatever follows on from Covid-19 must, if nothing else, be an opportunity to do things differently. Whether in relation to our political systems, the cities in which we live, the ways in which we work and spend our leisure time, our relationship with the planet and the natural world, the current historical moment offers an opportunity to rethink, to do things differently, to renew.

In 2020 Being Human festival imagined ‘New Worlds’. In 2021 it is time to renew our sense of Being Human.

This year’s Being Human festival will focus on ‘renewal’. Across the humanities we are interested in new ideas, new generations, new ways of doing things, new responses. This year sees a new president take office in America; Britain and Europe embark on a new relationship; and the COP26 Climate Conference in Glasgow will focus the attention of the world on finding new solutions to the climate emergency and ways to address it, from renewable energy to a renewed social contract between humans and the world that they inhabit. Cityscapes are being renewed, with monuments and public history being
interrogated and interpreted in new ways. Different ways of living are being considered, different identities are being explored, and the pandemic has pushed people all over the world to invent new ways of being social, being professional, and being human.

Of course, ‘renewals’ don’t have to be only contemporary. Renewals can also revisit past times of change or disruption, discoveries that altered our world, or renew our ideas about the past. They can be about breakthroughs in art, literature, film. They can be moments in which national cultures and identities were reconsidered, reimagined, realigned.

Across all the disciplines of the humanities, we are keen to support projects that help us think of ways of renewing approaches to:

- Health
- Faith
- Work & play
- Identity
- Climate

These are just starting points to get you thinking though. Surprise us! The main thing that we are looking for are projects that help us to demonstrate why the humanities are relevant to people’s lives and how they help us understand what it means to be human.