

# CENTENARY COMMUNITY FESTIVAL 2026: GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH ACTIVITIES & TALKS

## Background

The University of Reading's annual Community Festival is a free, family-friendly event celebrating the amazing research, creativity and community spirit that make Reading special. As part of the University's centenary year, this year's event has been renamed the **Centenary Community Festival**, marking 100 years of the University's connection with the town and community. The festival brings together staff, students, alumni, local residents, community groups, businesses and partners for a day packed with live performances, interactive activities, food, music and fun for all ages.

The research programme includes a research 'exhibition' featuring c.20 stands with hands-on activities, a programme of children's talks and research talks (15 minutes plus questions), and some workshops or panel discussions. As well as showcasing our research in an accessible way, this is also an opportunity for researchers to gain experience of public engagement with research (PER) in a festival setting. The research activities are popular and have been well received by both visitors and participants (view our films from the [2023 Festival](#), the [2024 Festival](#) and the [2025 Festival](#)).

The 2026 Festival will build on lessons from the past three years as we work towards a larger Festival for the University's centenary. It will aim to attract new audiences, who might not previously have attended a University event, from areas where the University already has some presence (positive or negative), including Battle ward, Central Reading and Oxford Road; Whitley, Whitley Wood and Church ward; Arborfield and Shinfield; plus Park and Redlands wards as immediate neighbours to campus. We will aim to build towards a schools outreach programme ahead of the Festival and beyond.

The research activities will be coordinated by a small working group consisting of members of the Research Communications Team, the Outreach Team, our two Academic Champions for Public Engagement with Research, and a member of the Events Team.

## Aims

One of the main aims of the Community Festival is to attract a wider audience to engage with our research, including people who have not visited campus or interacted with the University in a meaningful way before, and a wider age range.

Our aims for the research activities are:

- To showcase a wide range of research disciplines and approaches through a variety of hands-on activities, talks and panel discussions, workshops and creative opportunities such as film screenings or art installations.
- To broaden experience of doing public engagement for both research and professional services staff.
- To encourage early career researchers to get involved with public engagement, and provide a learning opportunity to develop/improve their skills.

## Activity types

We are looking for a range of hands-on activities including:

- Interactive hands-on research exhibits from research teams (up to 20). This can include research being carried out with local community organisations, giving those organisations the opportunity to reflect on working with the University as well as to showcase their own work.
- Short research talks, including from early career researchers, plus short talks for children (age 8 to 12).
- Debates, panel discussions or film screenings (max. 3 lasting 45 mins each)
- Workshops – with a focus on participatory methods/answering a relevant local question (max. 3 lasting 45 mins each).

## Criteria for selection

A call applications will be circulated in December 2025/January 2026. We have already received several enquiries, so we expect interest to be high. We may therefore have to prioritise which activities to accept to ensure wide participation and equitable coverage. We will only do this if absolutely necessary, so please do not be discouraged from applying again if you were involved in previous years.

### a) Interactive activities, installations etc.

- Activities should have a clear purpose and research message which is topical, or relevant to the local community
- Activities should be hands-on and interactive
- Clear target audience
- Equal representation/spread across research disciplines
- Previous experience of public engagement (not essential; we need the info for planning purposes)
- We will be able to provide support to a small number of researchers with little or no previous experience of PER to develop an activity. These proposals must have a clear and compelling research idea underpinning them, that is relevant to the local community, plus an outline idea of the resources needed.

### b) Research talks and workshops

- The subject should be of wide public interest, topical or relevant to the local community
- Talks (15 mins max.) should present current research in a lively and engaging way, with clear findings and/or implications of research
- Workshops (45 mins max.) should present a current research question in a lively and engaging way, that elicits active engagement and input from workshop participants
- Clarity of audience for the talk/workshop
- Equal representation/spread across research disciplines
- Any previous experience of giving a public lecture/workshop to a non-academic audience on this topic or any other?
- Speakers must be ready and prepared to attend a run-through of their talk a week before the Festival, so that we can record it for sharing on YouTube.
- Workshop organisers must be ready and prepared to run through timings and facilitation techniques at least two weeks ahead of the Festival.

## Outline application form and process

We ask researchers to submit applications via a form which sets out our criteria for selection and deadlines for submission and planning. The form will include the following questions:

- Your name, email address, department, type of activity

### Research stand/activity:

- Title of your stand/activity
- Please provide a short summary of your activity that we could potentially use for the Festival promotion (max 100 words).
- Please provide a full description of your proposed stand/activity.
- How does your stand/activity link to your research or area of expertise?
- Please describe the interactive element/activity of your stall.
- What is the main aim of your stand/activity?
- How do you intend to evaluate the success of your stand/activity? What impacts will you measure and how?
- Who is the proposed audience of your stand/activity?
- How many members of your team would be required to run your stall? (Please give the name of the team and who else is likely to be involved)
- Each vendor space includes one 6ft trestle table and two chairs - would you require any additional space or furniture?
- How much time would you require to set up?
- What are your power needs?
- Would you need access to water?
- Will you require any financial support? If so, what are your predicted costs?
- Would you bring your own display boards, banners or equipment?
- Would you require vehicle access for loading/unloading?
- Do you have any health & safety considerations or potential hazards?
- Are there any other specific requirements we should be aware of?
- Do you have any accessibility requirements?

### Research talk:

- Title of Talk/Session
- Which format best describes your talk/session? (e.g. lecture, workshop, panel discussion, other)
- Please provide a short summary of your activity that we could potentially use for the Festival promotion (max 100 words).
- Please describe your proposed talk, being clear about its purpose, research message and format.
- How does your talk link to your research or area of expertise?
- Would there be interactive elements to your session?
- How do you intend to evaluate the success of your talk? What impacts will you measure and how?
- Estimated session duration.
- Who is the proposed audience of your talk?
- Would you require a space other than a lecture theatre or classroom?
- Would you require any materials or props?
- Will you require any financial support? If so, what are your predicted costs?
- Do you have any health & safety considerations or potential hazards?
- Are there any other specific requirements we should be aware of?
- Do you have any accessibility requirements?

## Timeline

Application form opens	Week beginning 01 December 2025
Deadline for submitting applications	Friday 30 January 2026
Selected researchers/teams informed; Programme planning begins	Week beginning 23 February 2026 TBC
Confirmed plan of activities and resource requirements from selected researchers/teams; Summary for programme/publicity finalised	Week beginning 09 March 2026 TBC
Deadline for CPD/design – all requirements specified	March TBC
Run-through of stand/activity facilitation	April TBC
Run-through of all research talks	April TBC
Set up	Friday 15 May (afternoon)
Centenary Community Festival	Saturday and Sunday 16-17 May 2026