Social Sciences Impact Conference 24-25 March 2026
Impact in Motion: Navigating Uncertainty, Creating Change

Call for Contributions

Background and context

Social Sciences Impact Conference is returning over two days in March 2026. We are pleased to announce **Impact in Motion: Navigating Uncertainty, Creating Change**, where we will bring together diverse voices and experiences, interweaving ideas and research from both academic, policy and practice settings.

Our last Social Sciences Impact Conference, held in March 2023, invited colleagues to think about the radical changes and challenges brought about by Covid-19 and how, in a period of recovery, we could work together to deliver scalable, inclusive and responsible impact – turning 'Hope into Action'.

More than 200 social scientists, policy makers, public and third sector contributors, research funders and research engagement and impact professionals convened at St Anne's College. And more than 140 speakers from 64 organisations shared their insights across 37 sessions, including 10 livestreamed for online audiences.

The **world has changed rapidly** since our last conference, bringing **uncertainty and new challenges – but also new possibilities**. Issues that once felt distant or abstract are becoming more immediate, prompting us to think differently and act collectively. Social sciences can provide robust approaches, evidence and understanding to inform responses and reimagine futures.

We're navigating a complex landscape—political shifts, rising global tensions and conflicts, the rapid advance of AI and cybersecurity threats, the climate crisis, health and biosecurity risks, societal and cultural shifts, and changes in international aid, energy and supply chain systems. Higher Education, too, is under pressure and evolving within this context, calling for fresh approaches to engagement and impact.

While the pace of change can feel overwhelming at times, it also opens **space for creativity, collaboration, and renewal** and the social sciences have a critical role to play. This is a moment to harness uncertainty as a catalyst for connection, resilience, and positive transformation. Supported by the University of Oxford's ESRC Impact Acceleration Account, this conference will explore how

social science-led **innovation, inclusive engagement and partnerships** working **across disciplinary and sectoral boundaries** can help us shape a more hopeful and impactful future—together.

About the conference

Impact in Motion: Navigating Uncertainty, Creating Change seeks to delve deep into some of these issues and to hear a wide range of perspectives – both from within universities and alongside them. What have we learned so far? What does it take to deliver impact in uncertain and challenging contexts? How do we scale and sustain impacts in a volatile context? How do we deliver impact responsibly and inclusively?

This two-day conference will examine these questions and more. It will celebrate engaged and impactful research in the social sciences, and provide inspiration and support for all those hoping to create change for the better through their work.

The conference is aimed at social science researchers (and researcher collaborators from other disciplines) as well as engagement and impact professionals, and colleagues from third sector, policy, business and communities, who contribute valuable professional expertise and lived experience. We welcome those already collaborating and those with an interest in working with social sciences researchers, knowledge mobilisers/intermediaries and funders.

The conference is brought to you through the generous support of the University of Oxford's ESRC Impact Acceleration Account, with event support from our partner, Oxford Brookes University.

The programme

We are seeking contributions to a diverse programme of session across the two days. Sessions will typically be 50 minutes in length. We are open to a wide range of session types, including but not limited to deep dives, panel discussions, practical workshops and skills sessions. A wide range of perspectives are sought, either as individual or team applications.

The conference will share experiences and learning, techniques, and published research that will help **academic participants** with: designing and planning for impact; the practicalities of implementing their plan and engaging beyond academia; building and developing partnerships and engagement; monitoring, measuring, and evaluating impact; and communicating about processes of knowledge exchange and impact.

We would be delighted to have sessions and contributions led by **partner organisations and other interested parties**. Our academic colleagues will benefit from their professional and lived experiences and perspectives, hearing what is needed 'on the ground', and how best to collaborate. In return partners will hear examples of collaborations that have been successful, learn engagement techniques suitable for enhancing their collaborations with academics, have an opportunity to network and learn more about how social sciences can support them.

Engagement and impact professionals will be able to share their technical expertise and knowledge from working in specialist areas of engagement and impact. They stand to further develop their knowledge at this conference, making new connections and having an opportunity to step back and

think strategically about how they build capacity for engagement and impact in their own professional contexts.

Session types

There are opportunities for contributors to engage with the conference in a variety of formats. You can select your preferred formats in the online expression of interest form. We anticipate sessions will be presented in person but the programming team will consider requests for online/hybrid delivery of presentations and will do their best to accommodate such requests based on the technical set-up available and accessibility requirements of the individual contributors

- **Presentations** – short presentations sharing inspirational stories or posing a call to action (10 mins + Q&A). The programming team will group together 2-3 presenters on a similar theme.
- **Panel discussions** – a series of short presentations/provocations (5-10 mins each) followed by discussion on a topic. You can suggest a whole panel (3-4 participants) or put yourself forward to be part of a panel on a particular topic.
- **Deep dives** – in-depth examples of engagement and/or impact, sharing multiple perspectives from contributors (e.g. from researchers, partners and end users/ beneficiaries). Priority will be given to projects where research and/or impact has been co-produced with interest-holders; and/or lead by interdisciplinary teams. (50 mins)
- **Workshops** – interactive sessions engaging participants on a topic. These involve limited formal presentation, with a focus instead on audience participation.
- **Skills sessions** – offer your technical skills in the form of a training session on a particular skill/tool/method useful for successful engagement or impact.
- **Exhibits** – do you have physical or virtual project outputs that you'd like to share but don't want to lead a session? Tell us about your outputs (policy briefs, toolkits, artefacts, photos, videos, etc) and we will consider them as part of the exhibit.
- **Other suggestions welcome**!

Topics of interest

We have provided some suggestions for topics below to help generate ideas. However, these are not formal strands for the conference and are not an exhaustive list. We are very open to expressions of interest on other topics.

- **Addressing uncertainty and complex societal challenges –** What are the unique opportunities and constraints for social scientists? What is the value of social sciences? How can we ensure this is well understood and communicated? What are the benefits and challenges of a multi-pronged, multi-perspective approach to societal challenges in achieving impact? What are the opportunities in terms of working with other disciplines, combining and innovating when it comes to different approaches and different technical languages? How does cross-sector collaboration support our response to complex societal challenges?
- **Improving our impact practices** – what have you found helpful when planning for and integrating impact into your research or projects? What pathways did you choose to focus on and how did you create your impact plan? Did the reality match the plan? What went

wrong? What would you do differently and what did you learn from your mistakes? In a world evermore focused on metrics, indicators and 'measurable' evidence, how can you really prove the extent of your impact? Which evaluation techniques work well and how have you tracked your impact? Do we apply the same rigour to our engagement work as our research? What does 'best practice' looks like and are we engaging in responsible, ethical and inclusive ways?

- **Successful and sustainable partnerships and collaborations** – building relationships with a variety of different interest-holder groups – public and private sectors, civil society as well as broader community and publics. How are researchers responding to the needs, strengths and ideas of interest-holders? What do they want from research? What formats and techniques have you used to engage particular audiences? What unique outputs have you created, and how have you ensured they were adopted by users? How have you deepened and sustained interest-holder relationships and created value at different stages?

- **Impact at scale: innovation, business engagement and commercialisation –** creative examples of initial impact being developed further, e.g. roll out on a larger scale, reaching beneficiaries in additional regions/countries/sector, translating to new sectors. Examples of 'letting go' of your impact and allowing it to grow without your continued input (e.g. in the hands of external partners). How have you worked with business and industry to facilitate, target and grow your impact? What have you learnt? Your examples of social sciences innovation through commercial, social venture or other routes.

- **Using your research to engage with public policy** – how have you engaged with the policymaking community locally, nationally or internationally? How have you ensured your research reaches the right people at the right time to meet the policy need? Are the current mechanisms for policy engagement effective? What are the challenges and opportunities for researchers working in the policy-sphere? How do we ensure that policymakers have access to and make use of the best available evidence? How can research be more policy-relevant?

- **Public and community engagement with social sciences research** – informing and inspiring, consulting and collaborating with different 'publics' to have an impact. Do you have examples of when public engagement has been really worthwhile? What did you and the public(s) involved contribute or learn from the interactions and dialogue? How did engagement evolve and what role did it play in developing impact? What did engagement contribute to the research process? What is the legacy of the engagement and has this led on to future collaboration opportunities?

- **Navigating the Higher Education context** – how do we balance the day-to-day responsibilities of our roles with the aspiration to achieve meaningful impact? How do structures and support pathways in our institutions help or hinder this aspiration? How can we adapt to resource constrained contexts? What role do we have in creating a thriving and inclusive research, engagement and impact culture in our teams and departments? Where does reward and recognition, and career development come in? When we are committed to making an impact, what are the implications for the relationship between our professional and personal lives?

Submission process

We would love to hear from you whether you are working within, or alongside, universities and research organisations.

We encourage researchers from all social sciences disciplines, including, but not limited to, those working in economic, social, educational, political, technological and environmental themes.

We would love to hear from colleagues working in academic settings who:

- have **experience of engaging with audiences beyond academia** to make a difference
- have already **successfully created impact**
- are **on the pathway to creating impact**
- have **published on the topic of impact and engagement**, theory or practice
- have **provided professional support for impact and engagement** activities
- have **interdisciplinary collaborative experience**

We would also love to hear from contributors from across sectors and backgrounds who:

- have **experience of engaging with researchers** to deliver impact either from business, policy, third sector or communities.
- provide an **intermediary, enabler or broker role:** facilitating and convening partnerships; managing knowledge exchange processes; funding KE, innovation and impact; or supporting development of an evidence base and knowledge products for adoption by others.
- support KE and impact from research through **government and higher education policy.**

Applications from both individuals and teams are welcomed. For team applications we will ask you to confirm that all named participants are aware of, and support, the application.

Submissions should be made online by following the link on the front page of this document.

The deadline for submissions is **noon on 12 September 2025, UK time** and notification of outcomes will be sent in December 2025. Accepted contributors must confirm their participation by the date indicated in their offer email and will then be invited to register for the conference. Attendance on the day of your session will be free of charge; if you wish to attend both days, you will be asked to pay for the second day.

Information required for submission

- Name, job title / role, affiliation and email address for each contributor
- Topic of interest (please see list above)
- Preferred session type (please see list above)
- Proposed session title (maximum 25 words)
- Proposed session description (maximum 200 words)
- How you will make the session engaging and accessible for your participants. (maximum 200 words)
- What you hope the outcomes will be for participants at your session (maximum 100 words)

- Preferred session format (all contributors in-person; all contributors online; or a combination)
- Availability (Tuesday 24 or Wednesday 25 March 2026)
- How you heard about this call

Important Information

- We look forward to working with all of our contributors to create an inclusive, supportive and enjoyable conference. The conference team will facilitate a safe environment for the sharing of ideas and we expect that all attendees, including Contributors, to behave with courtesy and respect towards each other. We thank you in advance for supporting this approach.
- Contributors must be available to present at the conference on either 24 or 25 March 2026. We will try to accommodate presenters' availability but the decision on which date sessions are programmed will be made by the programming committee. We will be in touch to discuss with you if we are only able to offer a time (e.g. for a presentation/ panel discussion) that does not align with your indicated availability.
- The programming team may request that a submission for a particular session type be changed to a different type in order to be accepted onto the programme. E.g. a 50-minute deep dive changed to a 10-minute presentation in a shared session.
- The programming team will consider requests for online delivery of presentations and will do their best to accommodate such requests based on the technical set-up available and accessibility requirements of the individual contributors. However, the default is that sessions will be presented in person.
- Accepted contributors must confirm acceptance of their offer for a place by the date specified in their offer email or they may be removed from the programme. They will also be required to book via our online registration site, to ensure their delegate space is secured. Information will be provided in due course.
- Contributors will be expected to deliver the session as accepted for the programme. Any changes must be agreed in writing with the programming team.
- The text of a successful session description, along with the contributor names and affiliations will be published on the conference website, print programme and shared across other promotional materials, including via social media.
- Some sessions may be live streamed and/or recorded. A recording of the session and a copy of the slides may be published online after the conference. Filming permission will be sought from you if relevant.

Getting in touch

If you have any queries about the information in this document or the conference more generally, please contact the conference secretariat: impactconference@socsci.ox.ac.uk