# Researcher-Led Initiative Fund Application Form

Thank you for your interest in applying to the Researcher-Led Initiative (RLI) Fund.

Applications are invited from University of Sussex doctoral researchers and early career research staff for funding to support short-term, well-defined training and development, public engagement, and mental health, wellbeing and community projects.

The deadline for applications is **Thursday 30th April 2020.**

Please ensure that you have read the [guidance](#) before completing your application.

**1. Name**

███████

**2. Sussex e-mail address**

████████████

**3. Contact telephone number**

**4. School and department of lead applicant**
School of English

**5. Are you a doctoral researcher or early career research staff?**
Doctoral researcher

## Type of activity

**Do you wish to apply for funding for mental health, wellbeing and community, public engagement, or training and development?**
Mental health, wellbeing and community initiative

## About the mental health, wellbeing and community initiative

**Title of initiative**
Zoom(in) in on Nostalgia: The Way-Back Weekender

**When is the proposed initiative running?**
On multiple dates

**Start date**
05/06/2020

**End date**
07/06/2020

Mental health, wellbeing and community initiatives must fit into one of five themes.

Select one of the options below. Please explain your rationale when prompted.

**Creating community belonging**
No

**Cultivating time to breathe**
Yes

**Please explain your rationale**
During this unprecedented and oddly 'suspended' time due to Covid-19, creating and fostering communities is almost a necessity. My project 'Zoom(ing) in on Nostalgia: The Way-Back Weekender'

aims to curate activities over the span of a weekend to communally indulge in popular culture that is typically considered nostalgic across (most) cultures. The idea is to seek comfort in our past at a time when everything to do with the future seems uncertain, anxiety-inducing, and out of our control. Collectively immersing ourselves in nostalgic activities and then coming together for an informal discussion online will be a temporary release from the stress around quarantine and might prove to be – at the risk of using this word too liberally – therapeutic.

The rationale, then, is to offer comfort and contribute to the wellbeing of people by creating a space for relaxation in people's own homes while at the same time cultivating a feeling of community.

**Celebrating self and successes**
No

**Encouraging life outside of research**
No

**Sharing PhD/ECR experiences**
No

**How will your initiative promote awareness of, support, or improve the mental health and wellbeing of Sussex researchers, or foster a research community?**
Ensuring that the participants have their voices heard in the lead up to the event so that their preferences can be taken on board will make it more holistic, accessible, and inclusive. Since the event is entirely virtual, it will encourage participation from across countries and at a time of isolation, offer support and warmth. The central theme of the event is nostalgia -- a feeling that inherently sparks joy in relation to films, music and more -- and will bring people together to share their experiences, express their thoughts about a subject we all think about but rarely discuss with like-minded individuals. There is scope for some very exciting conversations at a time when people are cooped up in their own houses far away from lively discussions about their favourite books, films and songs. The Way-Back Weekender aims to initiate a community that will improve the mental health and wellbeing of participants through the simple act of offering a virtual community to someone watching a film sitting on a couch on their own; it will allow a release from the anxiety of the current circumstances.

**Who is the target audience of your activity, and how will you engage with them effectively? If your focus is on a specific group of researchers, how could your initiative be rolled out to others?**
The target audience for the event will primarily be the Sussex researcher community although will certainly not be limited to it. In the lead up to the event, I will be creating a 'Way Back Weekender' social media channel for promotions. As a Hive Scholar, I am lucky to have access to a community online that follows the Hive channels (Twitter, Instagram and Facebook), which I will also be using for promotions and engagement. I am also the co-founder of an arts non-profit organisation based in India called The Same Page with over a 1,500 followers online. The idea is to promote the event across different communities even if most of them might ultimately be Sussex based.

The premise of the event is inclusive and thus has no restrictions for entry – anyone and everyone who is interested can participate. The discussions following each say, movie or musical evening, will be held on Zoom so participants across countries can be present.

**What are the objectives of your activity? Please list the steps you will take to achieve these objectives.**
Before I lay down the objectives, below are the logistical details of the event:

The event is tentative scheduled for the weekend of 5th-7th June. In the lead up to the event, I will be promoting the 'Way Back Weekender' as a weekend of immersion in feel-good things from our past: films,

music, books, activities. I will be creating an Eventbrite page for the event and communicate with the participants (about Zoom details and more) through it.

5th June (Friday): (Throw)back to the Future

I will give 5 film options in advance (tentatively: Jurassic Park, Lion King, When Harry Met Sally, Back to the Future, and E.T – but people will have the freedom to choose a film of their choice outside of these 5 to include those who may want to watch it in other languages). We will all start watching at 6:30 pm BST and then get on an informal post-movie Zoom call to discuss how that made us feel: what made us feel nostalgic and why, what do we miss about those films, aspects we especially enjoyed, etc.

6th June (Saturday): The Recollection Collection

For this evening, I will have curated a collaborative Spotify playlist of the most nostalgic songs from the 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and 00s. But I will be circulating the playlist on email to those who sign up for the event where people will be allowed to add songs of their own if they like. Participants will be encouraged to dress in their choice of themed clothing (80s bandanas, fun disco sunglasses, Britney-inspired outfit, etc.) but it is not mandatory. At 7:30 pm, we will get on a Zoom call and listen to the music together while doing something nostalgic such as playing with playdoh, knitting, painting, sketching, collaging, etc, or even simply doing nothing and enjoying a drink alongside! At 8:30 pm, we will discuss what we made, what the process felt like, if it made us feel positive, how the music influenced what we created, etc.

7th June (Sunday): Lattes and Literature

At 10 am, we will have a relaxed tea/coffee morning where we will discuss our favourite nostalgic literature. This will be a casual conversation where people do not need to have read the same book. The idea is to keep requirements for participation to the minimum and encourage simple engagement in order to think about the aspects of literature that make it particularly 'nostalgic' for us, and why we seek a return to such literature (or perhaps in some cases, avoid it), in order to engage in a dialogue with, and consequences of, how we can associate certain memories with pieces of art.

Sunday evening: Untitled Short Talk by ███████████████████████

████████████ has agreed to give a short talk on popular culture and nostalgia. She works heavily with music, TV shows such as BoJack Horseman, and is currently working on her book on adolescence.
████████████████████

At 6 pm on Sunday evening, ████████████ will give a short 20-30 minute talk on Zoom followed by a brief Q&A to bring the event to a close.

Objective: At an unprecedentedly difficult time, it is natural for people to feel a lack of control over their future. As a final year PhD student, and a Hive Scholar who has been continuously engaging with Sussex's doctoral community over the course of the last 2 months, I can vouch for this looming sense of uncertainty that veils our future(s). There is an increasing trend of finding comfort and joy in things of the past that have the ability to offer solace and remind us of a time (even if illusory) when things were 'simpler,' more familiar, and in our control. I want to offer a space where ideas to do with aspects of art that make us feel nostalgic can be articulated and such feeling of comfort attached to our past can be expressed.

My own research is on nostalgia, visual art and American history. I work closely with the concept of 'nostalgia,' different kinds of nostalgia, and its role in our perception of our personal and collective histories. It is why I feel skilled enough to moderate and host conversations around this subject. That said, I do not want to put the pressure of having an immensely nuanced interaction on the subject because I want this to be a relaxing weekend that allows participants to feel joyful, indulge in some feel-good

conversations, and feel a sense of community through the conversations.

**How will you evaluate whether you have achieved the objectives of the activity? If your proposal is based on an existing U-DOC RLI, how will you build on what you have learned so far to improve your initiative?**
If this weekend can offer even a small group of people a sense of community and relief from their everyday stress through an old film or a song that brings them comfort, I will consider the event successful. Given this time, this event's only aim is to inspire participation and give people a reason (or an excuse!) to (communally) return to something that gives them pleasure. I will ensure that the participants' choices and suggestions are taken on board in the lead up and during the event. For instance, their suggestions the playlist or films can be taken on board and the changes can be made based on their need. A big upside of hosting this event online is that there is scope for flexibility and the project can be improved based on an ongoing needs assessment of the participants.

I will also be emailing a short feedback form post the event to all the participants so I can have a log of what did and did not work for the event.

**The RLI Fund is designed to provide short-term support to researcher initiatives. Describe how your initiative will be sustained in the future (if that is the intention). What is the potential legacy of the project?**
As part of the Hive, I have been involved in setting up an online community for doctoral researchers at Sussex on an app called Slack. I bring this up because the amount of engagement that we have had on Slack has been shockingly brilliant but mostly has been symptomatic of how important it is to have a community in difficult times. If this event is successful, I hope that it can carry on, especially during tougher times, as a way to bring people together and inspire conversations that may otherwise remain unexpressed. That said, this event is specifically designed keeping in mind the circumstances around Covid-19 and the uncertainty it has sparked off.

I also intend to take permission from all participants to record the Zoom calls as well as the talk given by ███████████. If I find that there is enough material to suture together a short, crisp, video encapsulating the intention of the event, I will create one. Assuming the length of each Zoom call and the footage I will have at the end, I have spoken to a professional video editor who is happy to work on it. The short video is entirely contingent on permissions received from participants. It would be a good way to round off the event and have it as part of the records of the Doctoral School and be published on the event's social media channels for those who could not participate.

I am presently in conversation with some library staff about setting up the final list of films, books, music (including those that were watched, read or heard by participants outside of those suggested by me) as a curated nugget of art and culture indulged in during the 'Way-Back Weekender' into the library database – a peek into the nostalgic imagination of a group of people during Covid-19. The film I make about the event could be included in this. If this doesn't work out, I will find a way to curate the final list either on Padlet or a website dedicated to the event for the purposes of documentation.

# Budget

Please provide a detailed budget indicating what you would spend the funding on if you are successful in your application.

Your budget should include a breakdown of costs and justification for each item (e.g. lunch for 30 people at £6 per head from Sussex Food; accommodation for external speaker at £80 per night at a University approved hotel or guest house). See the guidance notes for further advice on your proposed budget.

# Budget details

| Item details | £ |
| --- | ---: |
| Payment to the speaker | £150.00 |
| Payment to the video editor (contingent) | £180.00 |
| | **Total: £330.00** |

**Total requested**
£330.00

**Budget code**

# Supporting statement

You must submit a supporting statement (in PDF format) from your PI or Supervisor (for doctoral researchers) or Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange (for research staff).

Their name, title and electronic signature should  be included in the statement.

If you have any difficulty with this, please contact [researcher-development@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:researcher-development@sussex.ac.uk) or call 01273 873366.

**Upload your supporting statement here**