

## “Are You a Human(ist)?” Call attention to how the humanities are embedded in the public’s everyday engagements.

*Audience for this recommendation:*  
University humanities centers & departments

WE1S’s study of the media shows that the public engages with the humanities through everyday activities and events--e.g., visiting museum exhibits, attending book talks, or going to historical lectures (see [KF 5-8](#) and also [KF-5-3](#)). On the other hand, in-depth humanities disciplinary research appears to the media to be siloed in the academic world ([KF-5-2](#)). This indicates a disconnect between the “academic humanities” and how the public interacts with the humanities in everyday life. Significantly, the latter everyday activities--despite their popularity--may not even be defined or understood as “the humanities” by most participants.

How can humanities scholars and universities meet the public where they are? How can they help rehabilitate and expand the notion of *the humanities* to gain traction in *public* discourse?

### Try this:

Humanities centers and departments can host public forums on how people already engage in the humanities in everyday life.

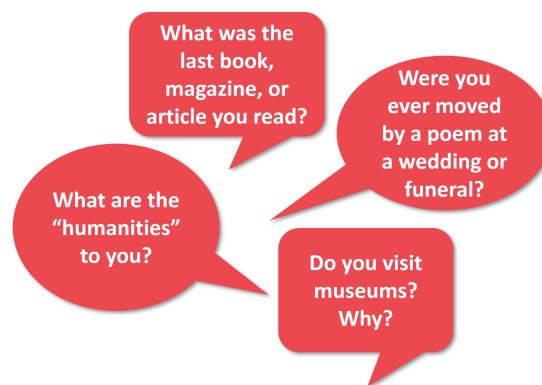
### Key Recommendations:

- Co-create a useful, operating definition of the humanities through dialogue with the public, rather than hand down authoritative definitions.
- Emphasize the humanistic nature of everyday activities such as reading books, going to art museums, and attending talks at local bookstores.

- Increase efforts to bring attention to humanities-related events in local or national media (not just in academic publications, listservs, or “academic Twitter” [see [KF-6-2](#), [KF-6-4](#), [KF-6-5](#) on the latter]). Our research shows that event announcements are a key way that the humanities show up in public discourse.
- Include community members as panel participants and moderators, not just as audience members.

The goal is to build bridges between the academic and public humanities, and to demonstrate that the humanities play a role in the everyday life of regular people. This is one way to bring to the foreground the “human” in the humanities.. *The humanities are an essential part of what it means to engage in acts of being human.*

### Conversation Starters & Activities:



#### Resources

**Research backing up this recommendation:** [KF 5-8](#) [KF-5-3](#), [KF 5-2](#) (see also [KF-6-2](#), [KF-6-4](#), [KF-6-5](#)).

**Related materials:** WE1S Bibliography on [Public Humanities](#) | [Value of Humanities](#). Also see the American Academy of Arts and Sciences’ Humanities Indicators 2020 survey report, [The Humanities in American Life](#).