

# Global Racisms Institute for Social Transformation

[grist.sociology.cam.ac.uk](http://grist.sociology.cam.ac.uk)





# Contents

<b>What is GRIST?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Vision and approach</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Model of work</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Projects</b>	<b>7</b>
Understanding Global Racisms	7
Creating and Sustaining Communities	9
Experimenting with Transformative Interventions	10
<b>Making an impact</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Why support GRIST?</b>	<b>13</b>



# What is GRIST?

**The Global Racisms Institute for Social Transformation (GRIST) is a pioneering academic initiative based at the University of Cambridge.**

Here at GRIST, we are reimagining how we confront one of the most pervasive issues in our societies: the systemic ingrained belief that some people are worth more than others, and all its consequences, using racism as the thread to start unveiling the workings of inequality. GRIST is hosted by the Department of Sociology and led by Professor Mónica Moreno Figueroa.

Born from the urgent need to generate applicable knowledge about racisms, GRIST radically experiments with how this knowledge is created. It brings together people who might not otherwise cross paths, curating a space where emotionally attuned methodologies support sustained collaboration. Rather than reproducing academia's competitive ethos or the sense of urgency that dominates contemporary life, GRIST fosters the innovation needed to address the complex social problems fuelled by racism.

By prioritising holistic and reflective processes, GRIST puts its faith in people's collective capacity to co-create solutions—especially when existing frameworks fall short and more expansive, adaptable responses are needed.

GRIST's mission is to redefine research excellence through collaborative experimentation, diverse partnerships, and emotionally engaged methodologies. We tackle global racisms by generating transformative conversations that centre knowledge, practical expertise, and the lived experiences of people from the global majority.



# Our vision and approach

**We work in a time shaped by both the growing recognition of racism and a parallel backlash against anti-racist initiatives.**

Alongside this tension is a broader anti-academic trend, marked by suspicion toward rigorous research and a dismissive stance on inequality, which is increasingly framed as a matter of opinion rather than evidence.

In this context, GRIST aims to renew the value of knowledge production through interdisciplinary, creative, and experimental research, while addressing pressing methodological and ethical challenges—particularly those that call for the decolonisation of knowledge histories and practices. We seek to challenge dominant US/UK-centric narratives and to deepen our understanding of the global logics of racisms by fostering intersectional perspectives in both research and public discourse.

**Our distinctive approach is grounded in three guiding principles:**

## **Curiosity**

The force that drives critical experimentation—encouraging bold, probing questions that reimagine what we know about racisms, and how we know it, across disciplinary and geographical boundaries.

## **Collaboration**

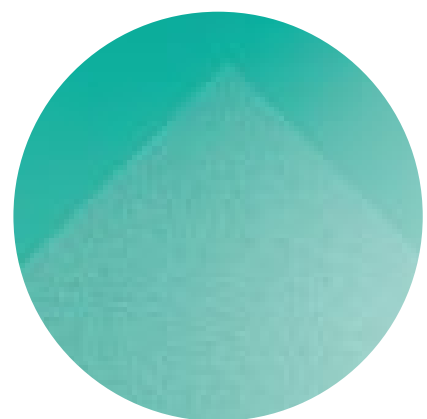
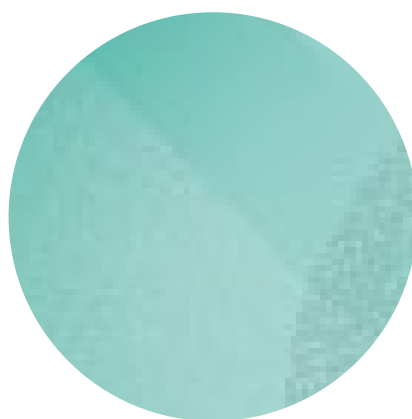
A commitment to building sustained collectives amongst scholars, organisations, communities, and key public sphere actors, co-creating responses and strengthening leaderships.

## **Transformation**

The pursuit of engaged research that actively works to dismantle global racisms and generates practical, actionable outcomes.

# Our model of work

Our three guiding principles of curiosity, collaboration and transformation are woven into our model of work, which seeks to understand global racisms, create sustainable communities, and experiment with antiracist interventions.



## Understanding Global Racisms

We aim to make a theoretical contribution driven by curiosity, deepening and expanding the understanding of racisms in the plural—emphasising their global and relational dimensions. That is, we highlight the connections, comparisons, and co-constitutions of racisms across space, time, and context.

At GRIST, we recognise that different forms of racism and dehumanisation are globally interconnected, shaped by historical and political ties between regions, and co-constructed through colonialism, migration, global capitalism, and geopolitical conflict.

This means understanding racism not as an isolated

or localised issue, but as one that must be examined relationally—through the shifting relationships between communities, nations, histories, and discourses.

## Creating and Sustaining Communities

We aim to make methodological contributions by placing relationships at the heart of our work—countering the divisions that racism creates among researchers and stakeholders, rebuilding trust in research, and encouraging an engagement with enjoyment and surprise in the process of learning and producing knowledge. We recognise that studying, understanding, and addressing racism involves

an emotional dimension that cannot be ignored and must be thoughtfully engaged.

Our projects confront oppressive dynamics in how knowledge is produced and shared, with a deliberate focus on fostering collaborative and meaningful transformation. This requires re-humanising research by embracing the creative, emotional, and embodied aspects of knowledge-making, while remaining critically attuned to the ethical and political implications of change.

Our goal is to develop research that is co-produced through an experimental and iterative ethos—and to support academics and practitioners in adopting this methodology to extend both individual and shared impact.

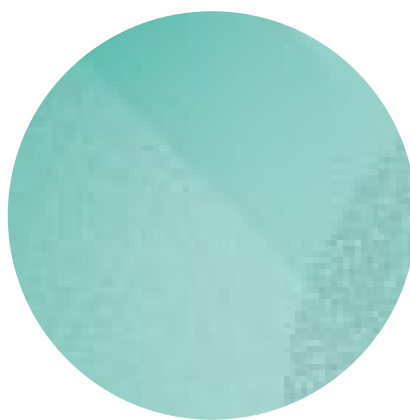


---

### **Experimenting with Transformative Interventions**

We explore how to facilitate deeper understandings and meaningful conversations around global racisms by actively experimenting with transformative interventions.

Our aim is to generate impactful contributions by mobilising insights, methodologies, and learning opportunities in ways that can be both seen and heard—ensuring that our work resonates not only within academic settings, but also across broader spaces of influence, dialogue, and decision-making.



---

Through a strong commitment to self and collective-reflexivity, ethical accountability, and creative engagement, we craft outputs that are accessible, compelling, and publicly available—designed to inform, inspire, and support action towards a world without oppression and more liveable presents and futures for all.

# Our projects

We are running a series of pilot research projects to demonstrate the transformative potential of our approach. Each project is housed within one area of our model of work, and incorporates one or more of our guiding principles.

## Understanding Global Racisms

This is where our research is housed, we explore and experiment with how to enable a global conversation about racism as a fundamental step toward its eradication.



## Caste and Race in South Asia

Despite significant economic and political change, caste remains a deeply embedded structure of inequality in India. At GRIST, we are convening scholars to explore the intersections between caste and race in relation to broader Global South experiences, both within and beyond academia. By treating caste as a multi-dimensional and interlocking system of oppression, this initiative opens up new perspectives for understanding racialisation globally. The project aims to generate fresh research opportunities and design impactful interventions that respond to the resilience and resurgence of caste in contemporary social life.

## Anti-Haitianism as a Form of Anti-Black Racism

This project positions anti-Haitianism as a critical framework for understanding anti-Black racism and the broader logics of global racisms. By investigating how anti-Haitianism has been constructed as a distinct form of anti-Blackness, we amplify the significance of Haiti and its people's ongoing struggle against racialised systemic inequalities. We are convening key scholars to co-develop accessible curricula and a public campaign that brings these insights into global dialogue. At the same time, we are experimenting with ways to sustain collaborative relationships among scholars across regions, while advancing decolonial approaches that challenge the erasure of Haitian experiences within dominant academic and public narratives.



### **Homogeneity, Intersectionality, and Racism in East Asia**

Inequality in East Asia is perpetuated by ethnonational narratives of homogeneity and a predominant focus on gender and sexism, which often sidelines discussions of racism. We are developing projects of collaboration with universities in Japan and China to develop shared grammars of inequality and address intersecting forms of exclusion. This includes exploring racisms in these regions, which are not a main focus on race studies or in initiatives dealing with intersectionality and inequality.

### **Climate Justice and Global Racisms**

Responses to the climate crisis often exacerbate racialised inequalities, giving rise to “climate apartheid” regimes and forms of racist dispossession. In collaboration with the University of Granada, we are developing a model workshop that integrates GRIST’s creative methodologies into research, activism, and public engagement on climate justice. The workshop brings conversations about racism, discrimination, and dehumanisation in South Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe into direct dialogue with climate justice debates and organising.

### **Freedoms**

In a context marked by intensified attacks on freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and academic freedom—affecting, among other areas, research on racism, human rights, gender, LGBTQ+ rights, and other entrenched inequalities—we are convening a series of conversations that recover histories and struggles for freedom. These dialogues aim to reframe and expand our understanding of what the pursuit of freedom might demand today. The series will explore diverse formats to bring together voices that are often kept apart, asking: how might struggles for freedom rooted in Indigenous and Black experiences reshape our perspectives on current threats to freedom?

### **Relational Racisms in a Global Perspective Conference-Workshop**

Research on racism often reproduces exceptionalist narratives that isolate global dynamics into regional silos. To counter this, GRIST is designing an experimental conference-workshop—Relational Racisms in a Global Perspective—which, on this occasion, brings together scholars working across South Asia (India and Pakistan), the Middle East (Turkey, Palestine, and Israel), Africa (South Africa, Tunisia, and Ethiopia), and Latin America and the Caribbean (Colombia, Brazil, Haiti, and Mexico). This initiative creates space for collective thinking that de-centres Global North frameworks and explores how racial and dehumanising logics travel, intersect, and become embedded in systems such as casteism, ethnicisation, and minoritisation. The aim is to generate relational, globally relevant insights into how racisms take shape and can be challenged across diverse contexts. In this edition, we will also experiment with linking different perspectives by convening both scholars and philanthropists who share a commitment to exploring approaches to change and addressing inequality. We aim to develop this into an annual conference, expanding the experimental model and enabling deeper, more diverse, and ongoing connections.





## Creating and Sustaining Communities

This second part of our work model explores how we can sustain meaningful collaborations that lead to impactful interventions. GRIST is developing initiatives that experiment with new ways of working together as an integral part of research, training, and the generation of impact.

### Difficult Conversations Between Academia and Social Justice Organisations

Ethical and decolonial concerns—alongside critiques of extractivist and appropriative practices—have strained relationships between academia and social justice organisations. In collaboration with COPERA (Collective for the Elimination of Racism), we developed a research project and workshop model that brings together social justice organisations and their academic allies to explore how new principles of ethical partnership can be articulated and put into practice, both in Mexico and beyond. We aim to adapt and reproduce this workshop in diverse contexts, renewing the potential for academia to engage in meaningful, collective partnerships.

### Thinking Us

This project models the process of building and sustaining a research community by using GRIST's location in the University of Cambridge. By bringing together Cambridge scholars committed to intersectional, anti-racist, and holistic research practices, we are cultivating GRIST's emotionally-attuned and creative methodologies.

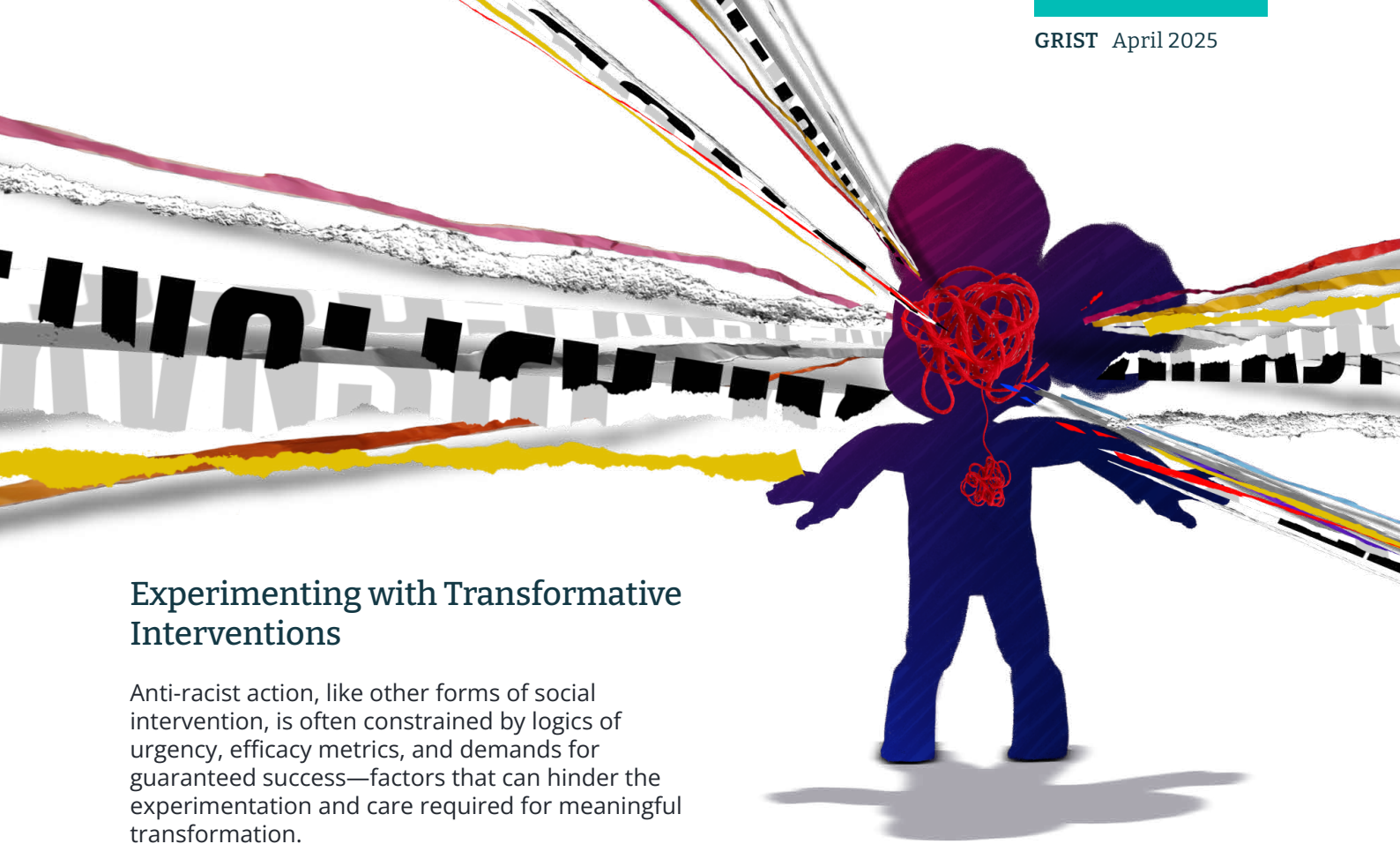
Through initiatives such as an anti-racist festival, the Caring for Transformation collective racial healing process, Creative Methodologies and Decolonising Practice through Creative Writing workshops, and the Relational Racisms in a Global Perspective conference, we aim to foster long-lasting, multigenerational, and interdisciplinary connections among researchers.

### Caring for transformation

This workshop series explores the emotional toll of systemic oppression and the possibilities for healing within and beyond academic spaces.

The sessions emerge from the radical framework of Collective Racial Healing, developed by Professor Emiko Saldivar in her course "Caring for Change" at the University of California Santa Barbara, USA, and her work with Professor Moreno Figueroa with the Colectivo para Eliminar el Racismo (COPERA) in Mexico. The course invites participants to reflect on the personal, political, academic and emotional dimensions of living with and researching racism, sexism, colonialism, and other intersecting injustices.

Through collective practices centred on active listening, we seek to reconnect thought, feeling, and experience—recognising healing as a shared, transformative process that strengthens both scholarly work and social justice efforts.



## Experimenting with Transformative Interventions

Anti-racist action, like other forms of social intervention, is often constrained by logics of urgency, efficacy metrics, and demands for guaranteed success—factors that can hinder the experimentation and care required for meaningful transformation.

As the third element of GRIST's working model, we are developing projects that explore innovative ways of intervening in social contexts to address and transform racist and other oppressive dynamics.

### The Structure Within

The Structure Within explores internalised oppression and the ways in which defensiveness, resentment, and inherited patterns of harm can disrupt individuals, collectives, and their efforts toward social justice. Through a bilingual English–Spanish public campaign, we are experimenting with how to position internalised oppression and internalised racism as central—and often overlooked—barriers to meaningful social transformation.

This initiative includes an animated film, a podcast series, infographics, and a forthcoming book, alongside the creation of a community of practice in collaboration with social justice organisations. The project is grounded in the belief that internalised oppression weakens transformation from within. One of its central aims is to explore how we can more effectively communicate this challenge to those deeply invested in justice work—supporting individuals and organisations in integrating this perspective into both analysis and action.

### Black British Voices Project

Developed between 2020 and 2023 by the Department of Sociology at the University of Cambridge and The Voice, this project represents the largest UK survey of Black Britons to date. It is a pioneering research collaboration aimed at delivering an authentic, community-driven account of what it means—and how it feels—to be Black and British today. As the project enters its dissemination phase, GRIST is collaborating to expand its reach by integrating our emotionally-attuned and participatory methodologies. We are developing transformative resources to support public engagement and deepen impact, which will be piloted through workshops and a national campaign across the UK.

### End Everyday Racism

This ongoing research project, active since 2018, seeks to deepen our understanding of everyday racism by collecting and analysing quantitative and descriptive data. The aim is to build a collective, evidence-based case that supports anti-racist advocacy and social justice activism. Now being extended under GRIST, the project is broadening its reach into the national and international Higher Education sector, and other organisational settings, while developing a public campaign strategy to mobilise this research for wider social impact.

## PhD Research as Transformative Interventions

Traditional PhD research often prioritises empirical and theoretical contributions over impact and transformative practice. At GRIST, we are supporting a doctoral project that challenges this norm by experimenting with participatory action methods that centre the learning, agency, and enjoyment of research participants. Chontudas and Mataepelos is an interdisciplinary study on the political economy of Black hair entrepreneurship in Colombia. It explores how Afrodiasporic social movements have mobilised Black hair politics as a form of antiracist, embodied resistance. Situated at the intersection of politics, economics, and culture, the research examines how Black entrepreneurs in the beauty sector articulate demands for economic justice as part of their broader struggle against racism, sexism, and the constraints of capitalism. We are working closely with this project to strengthen its transformative potential and aim to use it as a model for enhancing the impact of PhD research and foster a new generation of young scholars.

## Creative Methodologies

We are developing a new workshop series for MPhils, PhDs, and Postdoctoral researchers that explores creative methodologies as alternative ways of thinking, expressing, and producing knowledge within the academy. By bringing together doctoral researchers and creative practitioners—including poets, graphic novelists, artists, and filmmakers—the series opens space for experimentation, innovation, and collaborative learning. These workshops challenge traditional research practices and invite new modes of engagement with complex, intersectional topics, cultivating both intellectual transformation and collective healing.

## Decolonising Practice through Creative Writing

This initiative explores creative writing as both a method and a mode of expression within social science research. It challenges the separation between personal experience and scholarly analysis by using writing as a tool for reflection, critique, and the production of knowledge. The course engages participants in creative exercises and writing prompts that open space to explore complex concepts—such as ethnicisation and racialisation—through a more personal, imaginative, and emotionally attuned lens. The workshop builds on collective conversations from GRIST's Thinking Us process, where participants expressed strong interest in creative approaches and helped shape the content and methodology. Together, we are experimenting with what creative writing can offer social scientists—and what we, in turn, can offer when writing becomes both a method and an output within decolonial research practices. This workshop serves as a pilot model we aim to refine and replicate more widely as part of our vision of a more engaged academia.

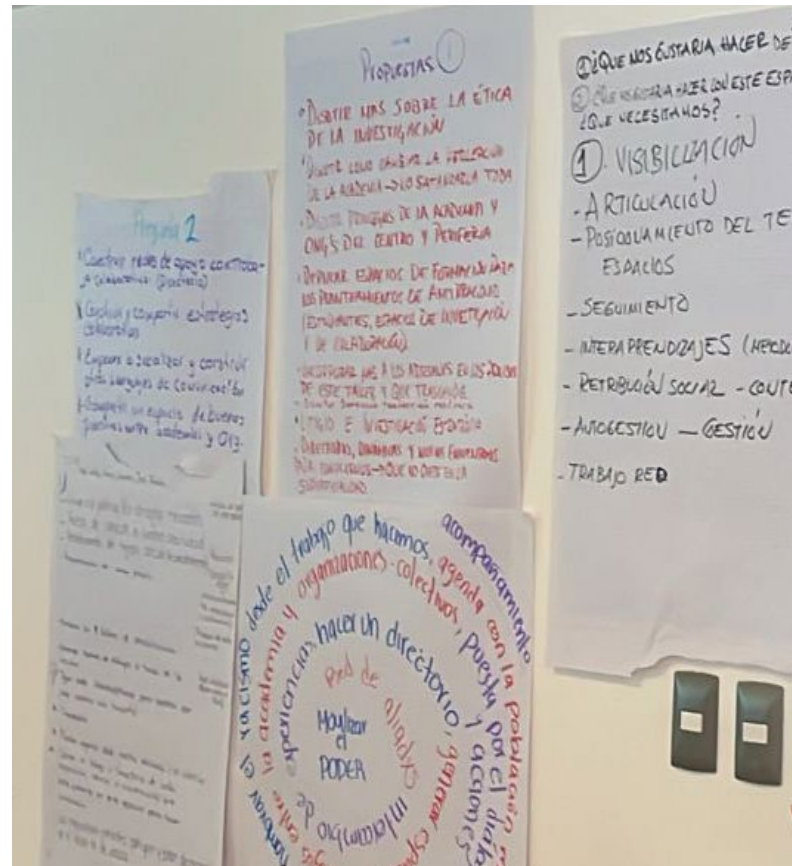


# Making an impact

GRIST delivers research with purpose.

By combining rigorous inquiry with emotionally attuned, creative methodologies, we generate trusted analysis and insights, creative methodologies and tools, and transformative learning opportunities that inform both academic innovation and real-world transformation.

Our work strengthens the capacity of organisations, public sphere actors, and communities to understand and address racism in its global and relational forms. With strategic investment, we can deepen our impact—expanding collaborative research, building sustained partnerships, and producing resources that fuel impactful, long-term change.



**“I’ve never experienced anything like this in Cambridge. I came away inspired, thinking about what can be done, and what I can do.”**

**“My main takeaway is hope – for the first time in six years I feel like there’s a chance here of doing things differently.”**

Workshop participants, *Thinking Us* festival



# Why support GRIST?

GRIST is more than just a research institute—it is an experiment in collaborative innovation, bringing together diverse voices to reimagine anti-racist practices.

By supporting GRIST, you will enable us to conduct cutting-edge research that directly challenges systemic racism and promotes social transformation.

We move beyond the competitive ethos of academia by fostering creativity, collective leadership, and emotionally-engaged research.

Our current seed funding was received from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation for the design phase (Aug 2023 – Sept 2025) and we are now seeking to secure continuation funding to begin the development phase (2025-2027).

We are looking for partnership opportunities for the development phase as a whole, as well as for individual projects. Our core costs are around £170k per year, with additional project costs between £165-200k. We are currently seeking £100k towards core costs in 2025-26.



## Organisations, collectives and individuals engaging with GRIST can:

- Develop and gain a global and relational understandings of racisms and intersecting forms of inequality of their research, work and projects.
- Be challenged to conduct research and develop transformative interventions through collaborative processes.
- Engage with and utilise tools that sustain creative processes.
- Be supported in generating actionable research and fostering antiracist, anti-oppressive transformation.



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

**For more information,  
please contact:**

**Mónica Moreno Figueroa**

**Professor of Sociology and  
Lead of GRIST**

Department of Sociology,  
University of Cambridge

+44 7760220560

mm2051@cam.ac.uk

**Clare Gordon**

**Associate Director, Humanities  
and Social Sciences**

University of Cambridge  
Development and Alumni  
Relations

+44 (0)7544 158 742

clare.gordon@admin.cam.ac.uk

**Urska Kovse**

**Associate Director, Trusts and  
Foundations**

University of Cambridge  
Development and Alumni  
Relations

+44 (0) 7707 290397

urska.kovse@admin.cam.ac.uk

*The proposals set out in this document are indicative  
only and they are not intended to form the basis of a  
legally binding contract.*