

Community, Congregation & Institution

For a synagogue, church, society, school, association, business, federation or other shared institution.

This is preparation, not homework. You do not need complete dates, perfect memory, or a box of scanned records. Circle what helps. Leave the rest. Uncertainty is part of an honest history.

Before we speak

- Define the institution's real beginning, which may predate incorporation.
- List founders, builders, sustainers, dissenters and people whose labour was rarely recorded.
- Identify transitions: buildings, mergers, closures, demographic shifts, leadership changes.
- Decide who the finished history is for: members, descendants, archive, donors, public, or all of them.

Gather only if it is easy

- Minutes, newsletters and anniversary booklets
- Photographs with names
- Constitutions, programmes, directories and correspondence
- A list of living members with long institutional memory

Prompts worth thinking about

- What problem was the institution created to solve?
- Who did the invisible work?
- What nearly ended it?
- What did members experience that minutes never recorded?
- What must be preserved before the oldest witnesses are gone?

Set your boundaries first

Before the interview, decide what may be explored, what should be handled carefully, and what is off limits. You can change those boundaries later. A useful history does not require surrendering privacy.

After the first conversation

No quotation is given before the first conversation. If the project is a fit, use the Story Mixer to show the balance you want - emotional depth, humour, intimacy, historical context, voice and boundaries. I then assess the actual scope and normally send a written quotation within 24 hours.

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