
What is Institutional Genealogy?

n. *genealogy*

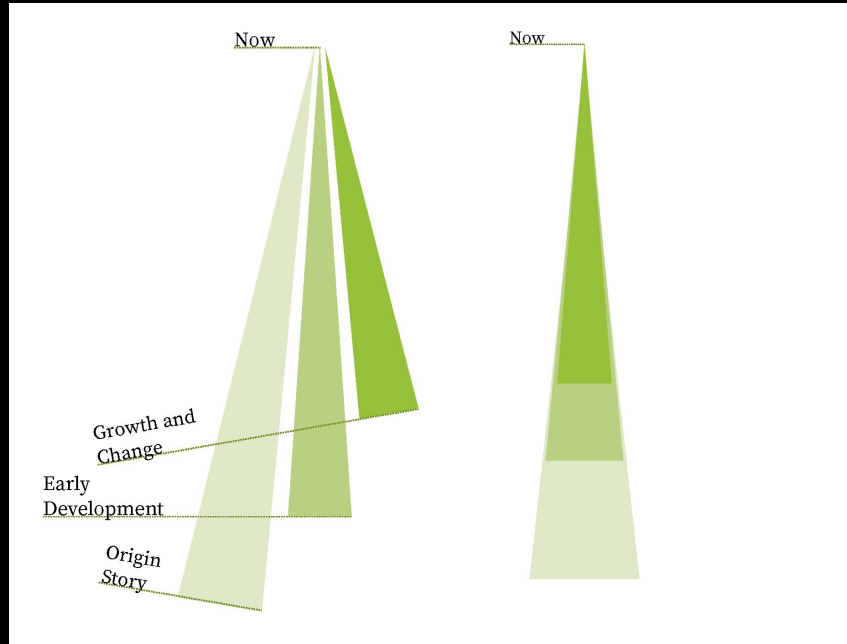
: the study of—or an account of—the descent of a person, family, or group from an ancestor or from older forms
- *Merriam-Webster*

n. institutional genealogy

: a critical framework for assessing an organization's origins, ancestors and older forms.

The past is always with us.

So, how we engage with and acknowledge organizational past matters.



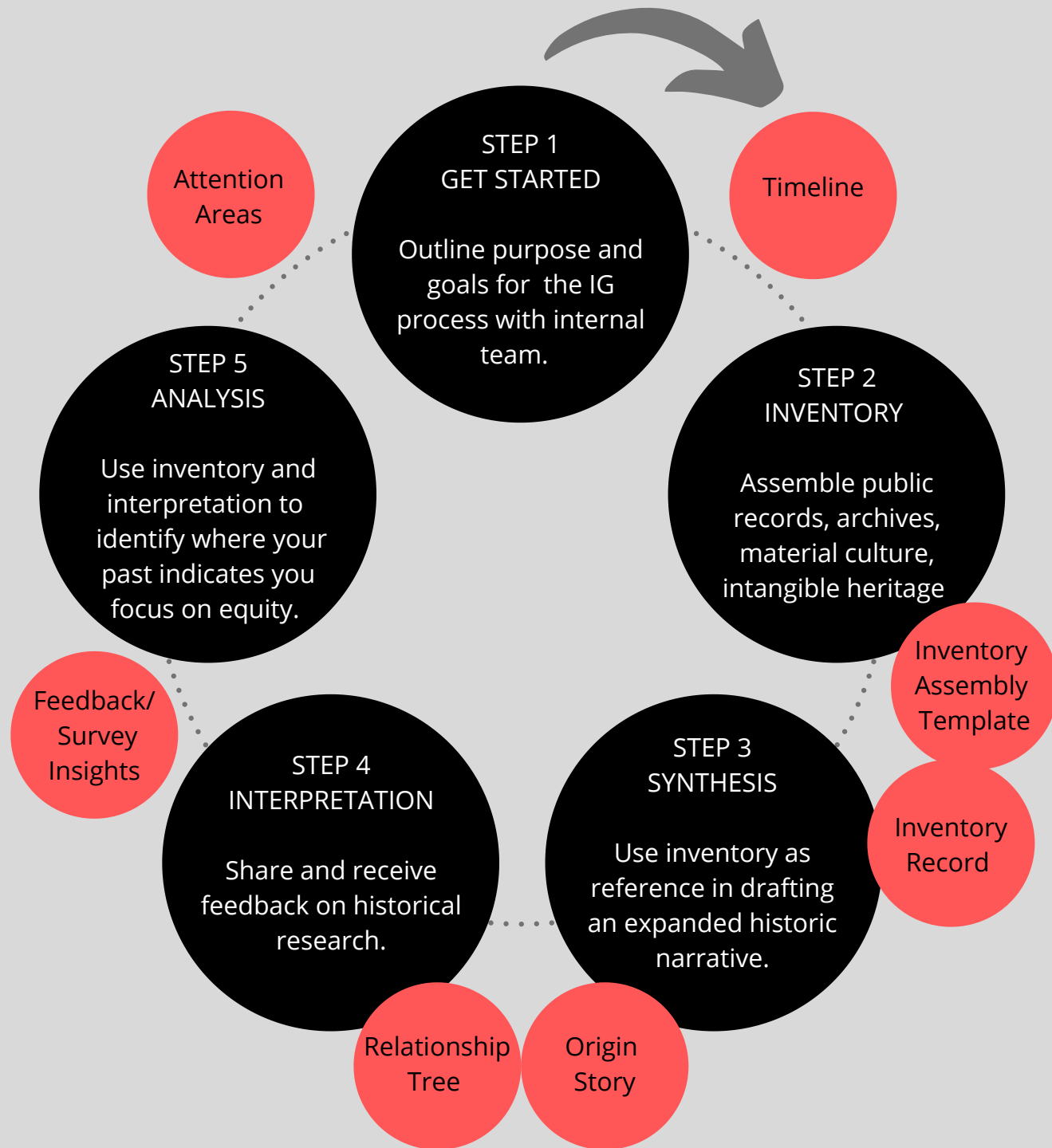
Institutional Genealogy is a **method**

to examine the past, designed to help organizations make connections between their past, present, and future and learn how actions from the past can continue to contribute to exclusionary and inequitable practices today.

- A practical, constructive, 5-step process.
 - Visual tools and conversation guides.
 - Oriented around collective meaning-making.
 - Careful to avoid romanticizing the past (**nostalgia**) or romanticizing the future (**postalgia**)
 - Designed to help you establish a foundation for moving forward.
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Institutional Genealogy

Process Map



The Landscape of Ideas:

Understanding and responding to institutional pasts (and their impact today) is an underutilized focus of change in organizations, but *not a new one*.

- **Remembering as resistance** (BIPOC scholarship and writing, Community-Museum Movement)
 - **Genealogy** in the philosophical tradition to look at the history of ideas.
 - **Temporal Identity** (Organizational Change Theory)
 - **Transitional justice** (Restitution and reparations at national scale.)
 - **Institutional legacies** ([Bringing Self-Examination to the Center of Social Justice Work in Museums](#), 2016 & [MASS Action Toolkit](#) 2018)
 - **Institutional Legacies of Slavery in Museums Guide** ([Visitors of Color](#), 2016)
 - **Institutional body language** ([Empathetic Museum Maturity Model](#), 2018)
 - **Patterns of (institutional) resistance & histories of (community) exclusion** ([MASS Action Readiness Assessment](#), 2018)
 - **Museum Solidarity Statements** ("Acknowledgement" Criteria, [MASS Action Museums and Anti-Racism Statements Workgroup](#), 2020)
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You can look to your past to learn from it, respond to it—and even heal from it.

“Historical and social context informs the conditions under which museums, historic sites and houses are created and within which their roles and purposes are defined. These sites cannot separate themselves from the collective memories that link their development with white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, abuse of labor, colonization, imperialist theft of art and artifacts, destruction or absencing of alternative ways of interpreting and representing art and artifacts, structural racism and other oppressions.”

Guillotte, G.; Phillips, C.; Patterson, A.; Russell, A.; Quinn, T.; Wittman, A; Bivens, J. (2017). “Ch. 1 Getting Started: What We Need to Change and Why,” *MASS Action Toolkit*. ([link here](#))

“Legacies based on systems of power and oppression will not go away simply by ignoring them. Dealing with them allows us to get to the heart of who our museums are for—determining for whom (and by whom) our cultural institutions are designed and, by extension, whose experiences are acknowledged by museums and whose are not.”

Paquet, R. & Wittman, A. (2015) “Bringing Self-Examination to the Center of Social Justice Work in Museums” *Museum Magazine*. ([link here](#))

"All that can save you now is your confrontation with your own history...which is not your past, but your present... [Y]our history has led you to this moment, and you can only begin to change yourself by looking at what you are doing in the name of your history, in the name of your gods, in the name of your language."

James Baldwin, 1968 Interview ([link here](#))

Why consider doing Institutional Genealogy?

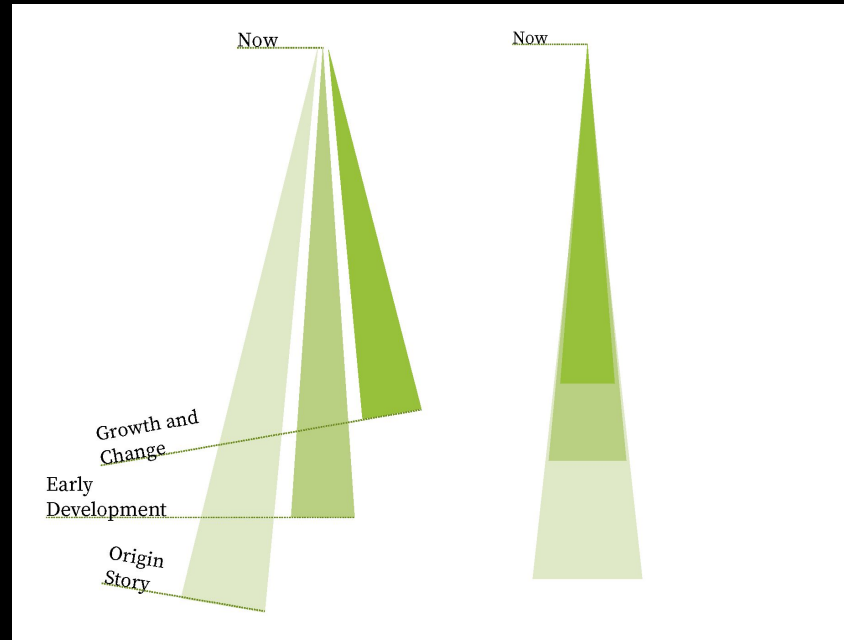
“Let's Act!

But where do we start? Where do we focus?”

The goal of Institutional Genealogy is to help you answer these questions through:

- Awareness - creating a foundation for action
 - Specificity - so actions take responsibility for your story
 - Prioritization - take action in areas of greatest impact.
 - Building Confidence - in taking the next steps
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If we know our past, we know ourselves. That deep understanding can translate to the confidence necessary to prioritize and plan our goals for the future.



*What aspect's of your organization's history
would you want to learn more about through
Institutional Genealogy?*

Institutional Genealogy charts a path to organizational self-awareness so that organizations can work wiser, not harder, to embed equity, commit to ongoing inclusive transformation and become more relevant to stakeholder communities.

Institutional Genealogy is not about recovering knowledge for its own sake. It is about claiming and connecting with the wisdom available to you when you look inward, engaging with institutional experience, for the purpose of taking action.

Institutional Genealogy will likely reveal aspects of your history that are uncomfortable when faced, or that elicit guilt about pain caused by institutional impact.

The focus of this framework is the process of transitioning from those feelings to constructive responses that have the potential to improve your organization and strengthen your efforts to advance equity.

Thank you

Institutional Genealogy is a working framework that will develop and change with new input and understanding generated by those that use it and future contributors.

**Thank you to development advisors
Chieko Phillips, *4Culture* Heritage Lead and
Dr. Rose Paquet, *Incluseum* Cofounder/Codirector.**
