

## Common Phases in an Opening Meeting

Given the collaborative nature of our meeting design process and the high degree of customization of our meeting designs, we can offer no “typical” meeting format. However, many meetings — in particular meetings that bring a group together for the first time — have the following phases.

PHASE	OBJECTIVE
ENTRY	To greet people as they enter in a manner that is welcoming and hospitable.
OPENING COMMENTS	To welcome people as a group, remind them about the objectives of the meeting and, perhaps, its history, and to say a few words about the structure and time boundaries of the meeting.
INTRODUCTIONS	To help people become known to each other as people.
AGREEMENTS	To achieve consensus in the group about how participants want to relate to each other during the meeting. This involves either accepting or revising proposed agreements that have been included in pre-meeting communications. (This phase may occur before introductions.)
OPENING QUESTIONS POSED BY FACILITATORS	To generate a shared pool of information about the concerns and interests of those in the room; to reveal information ordinarily silenced on the issue; to encourage participants to reflect upon and speak from their experience; and to enhance curiosity about others' views.
PARTICIPANTS ASK QUESTIONS ARISING FROM THEIR CURIOSITY	To encourage listening guided by curiosity and interest and to support and expand upon speaking that is fresh and engaging.
MIDDLE PHASE	The objectives for this phase are highly dependent on the groups' objectives for the meeting and on what has occurred in the meeting so far. The spectrum of possibilities is wide, ranging from highly structured exercises to very open discussions.
NEXT STEPS	To assess whether what has occurred has stimulated ideas for actions and, if so, to achieve consensus about what should happen and who will do what to make it happen.
REFLECTIONS AND PARTING WORDS	To give participants an opportunity to reflect on and speak about their contributions to the process, learning, and shifts in understanding and to express appreciation for what others have offered. This is also a time to say anything that feels left over or incomplete and, perhaps, to note what has been especially useful or might be improved.

