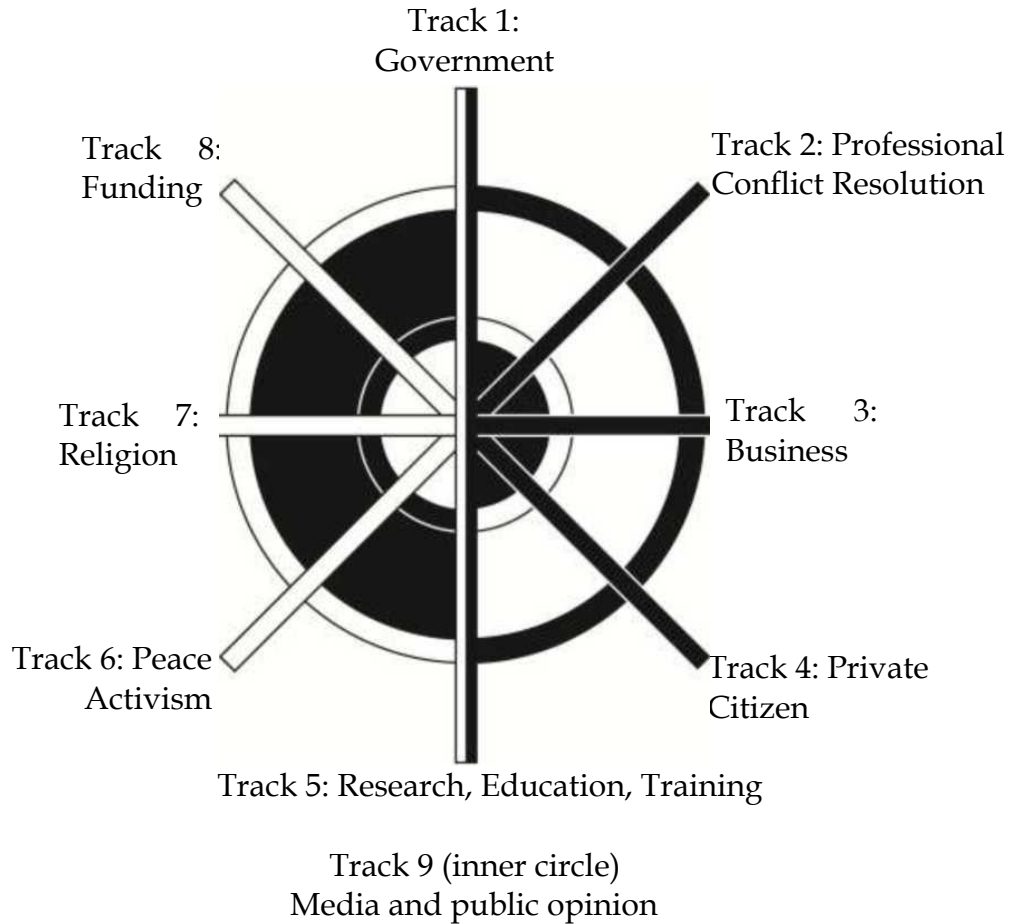


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Guidelines for Newcomers to Track Two Diplomacy

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## INTRODUCTION

Citizens interested in helping resolve national or international sectarian disputes should know that there are essentially two paths open to them. The one most traveled is the traditional route: official government-to-government diplomacy among instructed representatives of sovereign states, known throughout the diplomatic world as "Track One."

Alternatively, however, citizens might consider taking "Track Two": diplomacy among private citizens or groups, or among people from groups in different countries, outside the formal government power structure. The advantages of choosing the latter track are clear: citizens can take the initiative when governmental involvement is either tentative or awaiting more agreeable conditions for reaching an agreement. By easing the anger, tension, or fear among the parties, persons involved in Track Two efforts have been quite successful in laying the groundwork for international agreements and treaties, that are then signed by Track One officials. The recent agreement between the Israeli government and the PLO, is a case in point.

Because Track Two (citizen) diplomacy is more flexible, less structured, more innovative and risk-taking – and more *deniable* if it does not work – the expectation has been that the trend would be viewed positively by diplomats around the world. Unfortunately, Ministries of Foreign Affairs and even the U.S. State Department have not been receptive to these ideas. The absence of any formal recognition, however, may have been a boon for the development of citizen diplomacy. While Track One has been criticized for ignoring or rejecting ideas that responsible private citizens believe should be explored by their government, Track Two has expanded dramatically in recent years in the United States and internationally.

One excellent example of this phenomenon is the work of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). This private U.S. citizen's environmental group was frustrated by the U.S. Government's refusal to join a nuclear testing moratorium initiated by the Soviets in August 1985. The United States claimed that such a ban could not be verified. The NRDC flatly disagreed and negotiated and signed an agreement with scientists from the Soviet Academy of Sciences on May 28, 1986, permitting on-site verification at three sites in the Soviet Union and three sites in the United States. Over the following two years, U.S. and Soviet

scientists set up, staffed, and operated three seismic monitoring stations in eastern Kazakhstan, some 120 miles from the principal Soviet nuclear weapons testing facility, and three similar stations in Nevada.

This Track Two citizen action proved to be very successful; so successful in fact that the NRDC was able to effectively destroy the rationale of the U.S. Government's position. The equipment they had used was so sensitive that it could detect any underground nuclear explosion, no matter how small. The data was turned over to the U.S. Government and U.S. policy was finally reversed. In fact, President Clinton decided in July 1993 to continue the underground test ban moratorium that President Bush and the Congress had agreed to in September 1992.

Third-party facilitation is an extraordinarily sensitive, sometimes life-threatening issue that requires extensive knowledge of the process. The guidelines set forth in this article, evolved through discussions with a number of people, are designed to help those individuals who wish to seriously explore becoming involved in third-party facilitation of ethnic or sectarian conflict. Divided into four successive phases, each building on the previous phase, the guidelines are intended to focus the reader's attention on the serious nature of the subject.

If you are serious about working as a facilitator or participant in Track Two diplomacy, it is important to become knowledgeable about the subject. The field of citizen diplomacy is relatively new, but expanding. There are, however, only a handful of books on the subject. Become familiar with these sources and discuss your interests with some of the authors, if possible. Inform yourself about the role of a facilitator and how that differs from an arbitrator, mediator, or a Track One diplomat. Study intercultural communication and recognize that we all have our cultural biases. Be aware of what is possible. Know the difference between conflict management and conflict resolution. Understand "win-win" versus "win-lose," and know the literature on the art and science of negotiation, both at the national and international level.

Once you are familiar with the literature, take a look at yourself. Do you have the attributes that make a good facilitator?

**Compassion.** Sympathy, enthusiasm, and the desire to help your fellow citizens are necessary, but are not nearly enough.

**Patience.** Americans are the most impatient people in the world. You must learn patience. Do not try to impose your sense of time or schedule on an ongoing process, especially when dealing with another culture.

**Humility.** Modesty and humility do not come easily, especially for Americans, who often think they have all the answers to the world's problems. We can all learn from each other and from other nationalities and cultures.

**Good Faith.** Honesty, integrity, and good faith are all essential elements when trying to establish a trusting relationship with all of the parties involved. This takes time and skill to achieve.

**Personal Interests.** Be careful of your own ego. Do not seek to advance your interests at the expense of the other parties involved. A facilitator must be neutral.

**Know yourself.** Are you a creative person? One of the strengths of Track Two diplomacy is that it encourages innovative approaches to old problems.

**Qualifications.** There are no automatic credentials for entering this sophisticated field that can make you a "Track Two Expert." You will build your credibility gradually, as you demonstrate personal integrity, intelligence, expertise in related fields, extensive experience in cross-cultural dispute resolution, and common sense. Your clients will be the best judge of your expertise.

## **PHASE II: ANALYSIS AND INVOLVEMENT**

Having passed through Phase I successfully, analyze your own interests and prepare for your involvement in the Track Two process by considering the following points.

**Focus.** It is more useful to focus on one type of conflict and develop expertise in that area than to move from conflict to conflict. Try not to overload the channels of communication. Be aware that the States of the former Soviet Union, Northern Ireland, and South Africa are currently very popular Track Two subjects in the United States.

**Communicate with Others.** No matter what conflict you choose to focus on, remember that many people have been there before you. Find out who they are, get to know them, and learn from them. Perhaps you should join their ranks and work together rather than going it alone. Others can teach you a great deal.

**Knowledge of the Subject.** Once you have decided on the area you wish to pursue, immerse yourself in the subject. Read widely, identify the issues and the different points of view, talk to knowledgeable persons in your own country, and become familiar with the history, religion, culture, mores, and even the language of the groups with whom you will be interacting.

**Develop a Plan.** Carefully think through your aspirations and your potential role, and develop a written plan identifying your goals and methods. Goals should be realistic and should be projected over a five-year period.

**Define the Process.** Make it clear from the beginning that you are not

speaking for or representing any government, but that you are acting on your own or on behalf of a nongovernmental group or organization.

**Institutional Support.** Try to obtain some form of institutional support. Having the backing of a university or a foundation or a nongovernmental organization will considerably increase your credibility and effectiveness. Free agents or individuals are discouraged by all parties.

**Equality.** Experience has shown that interaction among people of equal status is often more effective than when the disparities are too great. This will also make access and credibility easier.

**Agenda for Solutions.** Any newcomer's agenda for a "solution" probably has been already considered and rejected years ago. Do not try to impose your solutions or reject other approaches to problems. Try to work with other involved parties and take small steps that may lead to a solution.

**Commitment.** Most conflicts in which you become involved have been going on for years or decades, if not for hundreds of years. Outsiders are often not welcome—especially newcomers who arrive, wave the magic wand of their "solution," and soon depart. Your presence must be seen as a commitment, which will take time, human resources, money, and patience. There are no quick, easy solutions. People will begin to take you seriously when you say to them that you are making a five-year commitment to their conflict.

**Timing.** The timing of your initial appearance on the scene is most important and should be carefully considered and coordinated with others who are operating in your subject area.

### **PHASE III: FOLLOW THROUGH**

An understanding of both the principles and the ethical standards defined in Phase II are essential to your success. Now that you have started down the facilitator's challenging path, what are some of the specifics of which you should be aware to maximize your chances of succeeding early in the process?

**Contacts.** Long before you leave your home base, contacts must be made with the parties concerned. Your foreign counterparts must provide you with some signal that they agree to your involvement and indicate the desired timing of your arrival. The development of a joint venture, where all parties have equal status, will give the project more credibility. Your entry into the conflict must be carefully considered and should be facilitated by someone who is a party to the conflict.

**Personal safety.** Upon arrival in the country of your Track Two activity, advise your embassy of your presence and the intended length of your stay. You might even call on the embassy political officer for a briefing on the current situation. This should not be viewed as an infringement upon your privacy or as a constraint upon your freedom of movement, but rather as a safety precaution designed for your protection.

**Promises.** Do not raise unjustified hopes in the minds of the participants about rosy solutions, moneys forthcoming, projects to be launched, and the like. False promises and raised expectations are far worse than no promises at all.

**Confidentiality.** Confidentiality by all parties is critical to success. This means no press releases, press conferences, speeches, articles, books, or media coverage about *your* role. Even if some modest success is achieved, it can be nullified immediately by premature, unilateral publicity. If progress is made, a joint communique can be negotiated and released at some appropriate point by all parties simultaneously. Unilateral publicity by any party is always destructive. In addition, off-the-record interactions must always remain confidential.

Once you have completed a segment of your long-range goals, you must realize that no ethnic or sectarian conflict will ever be "resolved" by one event.



## PHASE IV: DISENGAGEMENT AND AFTERMATH

What are your next concerns?

**Re-entry Problems.** A Track Two practitioner must be particularly sensitive to what is known as the "re-entry" problem. This occurs after the parties have conducted their Track Two interactions and are ready to return to their homelands. The return may be to a hostile environment and can be dangerous for the participants. The re-entry must be carefully discussed in advance and well-managed to ensure a minimum of danger to the returnees. Practical, real-world simulations of re-entry scenarios are often helpful.

**Handling Success.** If your actions, over time, bring about some small forward movement in the resolution of the conflict, you should inform your government of this. You should not view this as a restraint on your efforts. The government representative you contact, either in the foreign country or your homeland, may be in a position to provide you with useful information or help you in some other way.

**Costs.** Track Two facilitators should operate on a *pro bono* basis, at no cost to the participants. There should be no conflict of interest between the facilitator and the other parties.

**Track One/Track Two Relationship.** The interrelationship between the two tracks can be a sensitive one. Track Two facilitators do not want to feel pressured or unduly constrained because they are exploring a policy that Track One opposes. Track One diplomats, on the other hand, like to remain informed of citizen action. Track Two facilitator must recognize that if their initiative is successful, they will probably have to merge with Track One eventually. Governments are ultimately responsible for negotiating, signing, and ratifying treaties and other formal documents that may be needed to seal a successful Track Two initiative.

## CONCLUSION

With careful preparation and skill, Track Two facilitators can be successful in reducing tension and fear among the parties, can start the process of forgiveness, can improve communications between the groups in conflict, and can help to start the peacebuilding process. If these goals can be achieved, all of the effort that has been made, by all of the parties, will be justified and worthwhile.

This paper was first published as "An Ambassador's View of Track Two Diplomacy," written by Ambassador John W. McDonald, in *Arbitration Journal* 45 (June 1990): 10-14. It has been revised and updated by the author in this presentation.