The U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group: Make Agent Orange History
Track Two diplomacy and the case of the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group

Track Two Diplomacy Discussion Guide

**What is it?**

The term refers to unofficial meetings between parties who are not acting in an official capacity on behalf of a government or group, and whose intentions are to resolve conflict or mitigate tension through exchange of ideas, information, and perceptions. For this reason the term ‘citizen-to-citizen dialogue’ is used interchangeably for this form of diplomacy. Over time this term has also been used to describe cultural, scientific, artistic, and sports related events that connect people whose nations or groups of affiliation are in conflict.

It does not refer to official communication between governments or groups. Official diplomatic discussions between representatives of a state or state-like authorities like state departments, ministries of foreign affairs, and other governmental departments are called ‘Track One’ diplomacy.

**Who participates?**

Participants in Track Two discussions are non-officials of conflicting parties including: private citizens, scholars, scientists, senior journalists, former government officials, or government officials acting in an informal capacity, former military officers, policy-makers, and often conflict resolution professionals.

**When do non-officials engage in Track Two diplomacy?**

Track Two talks are usually conducted in cases where direct interactions between governments or groups are not ideal because of the potential to generate conflict, or when conflict may escalate over hardened positions on potentially volatile issues.

**Where do Track Two talks take place?**

Track Two talks are often hosted by governments of neutral countries, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or other neutral entities such as universities, or research institutes.

**What are ‘Soft’ Track Two talks?**

Dialogues that serve as a platform for exchanging viewpoints and information between people whose parties of affiliation are involved in a dispute in order to foster mutual understanding of positions. Participants often become messengers to their respective communities and governments with whom they share valuable information and insights gained through the discussions. These shared impressions gained through Track Two talks may even help to inform new policies.
What are the key elements of Track Two talks?

a) Neutrality—Within the context of the dialogue group, the participants must be, agreeably, at a neutral position of power relative to each other; participants must enter the dialogue in good faith with a neutral stance on the outcome of the dialogue, addressing their concerns while leaving personal agendas outside and working toward the larger purpose of the talks; and the convener must not represent any one point of view in regard to the agenda issues.

b) Timing/window of opportunity—Track Two talks are generally in response to timely concerns or conflict that if not dealt with may escalate, or cause opposing parties (often governments) to become further entrenched in their positions.

c) Stakes (more opportunity)—The value of Track Two diplomacy is that it provides all stakeholders with an opportunity to participate in determining an outcome that impacts them and their constituents, whether it is designing an action plan, negotiating terms of an agreement, or establishing policy. A Track Two forum, in the absence of “official” government representation and political pressures that accompany it, often allows for more creativity and outside-the-box problem solving.

d) Discussion channels—Dialogue changes from one way, often top down from a power source, to two-way discussion between neutral participants.

e) Participants’ credentials—The credentials of participants in Track Two talks are an important consideration because of the role participants’ play in influencing governments or other organizations, each other, and the public. Private citizen acting in unofficial capacity are often selected for their expertise related to a relevant field, proven ability to act in a neutral capacity, and/or ability to influence decision-making powers with decisions or proposals generated in the Track Two talks.

What are ‘Hard’ Track Two talks?

In these exchanges the direct purpose is to build on unofficial communications between parties and ultimately achieve an official negotiated arrangement between governments or groups. Participants in Hard Track Two talks are intended to engage in the dialogues and act as conduits to official parties or governments. Hard Track Two discussions are often highly confidential and held in secrecy.

What is ‘Multi-track’ Diplomacy?

This term expands the Track One and Track Two diplomacy concepts and acknowledges the importance of involvement of all sectors of society in a conflict resolution process between governments or groups. It includes peacemaking through commerce, personal involvement, learning, advocacy, faith in action, providing resources, and information gathering and dissemination.