




How to

**ENGAGE LOCAL BUSINESSES
AS ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATES**

Panda Ambassadors

A person wearing a hat and a backpack is shown in profile, looking out over a vast, golden landscape at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, hazy glow. The person is holding a pair of binoculars to their eyes. The background consists of rolling hills or mountains under a bright, orange sky.

WWF works with national and international businesses to reduce their environmental footprints, make sure their goods are sustainably sourced, and persuade them to become champions of change in the industry. While we're working with the big players, there's an opportunity for you to reach out to local businesses and organizations in your community to encourage environmental stewardship.

Step 1. Decide who to contact

As a Panda Ambassador, your biggest impact will be in reaching out to small, locally owned and operated businesses and organizations. Think about your favorite local eatery, the local mom and pop hardware store, the neighborhood market or craft store. You can also reach out to local churches, community centers, and nonprofits.

Step 2. Decide how to contact them

If you've decided to engage a small, local business without a ton of foot traffic, an in-person visit might be the best way to begin the conversation. Pick a time when the store isn't busy. If there's a line or a ton of people, just come back later.

For a business or organization that's usually busy, like a restaurant, an email is probably your best option. This is also the best option if you're not sure who is the right person to talk to—that way your email can be forwarded along to the most appropriate person.

Step 3. Start the conversation

Whether in-person or via email, start the conversation by introducing yourself, explaining that you are a local ambassador for WWF, and asking what the business or organization is already doing to minimize its eco-footprint. You might be surprised—a lot of small businesses work hard for the environment behind the scenes but never think to advertise that fact.

If they are already doing a lot for the environment, thank them and ask (a) whether they would mind if you shared that information with the community, and (b) whether they are interested in doing more—and in what specific areas. If they aren't doing much or don't know, ask if they'd like more information on some basic ways to start.

If the person you're talking to says they aren't interested, that's OK. Leave your contact information and ask them to let you know if they want to discuss greening their business in the future.

Step 4. Covering the basics

If the business is interested in learning more, great! There are six key areas where small businesses can start to think about their eco-footprints. Go through each one with them and find out where more could be done. You should be able to find two numbers for each of your senators and representatives—a local and a DC office. Call both if you have time.

PROCUREMENT

Stock

Is the business stocking or serving goods that are sustainably produced and sourced? If not (or if they don't know) the best thing they can do is to start saying to suppliers: "Tell me about the environmental impact of this product—can you tell me whether it was made sustainably?" This is to get information, but also it sends a message to suppliers and intermediaries that people are interested in sustainability.

The next thing to do is start shopping for products that are certified whenever possible. Credible certifications take the guesswork out of sustainability. Paper and wood products should always be Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified. Food products can also be certified—the most common certifications are from the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) for wild-caught seafood and the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) for farmed seafood.

Office Supplies

In addition to the goods a business is selling, the materials that run the business can also have an impact. Again, paper and wood products (toilet paper and paper towels, printing paper, receipt paper, etc.) should be FSC-certified. They usually don't cost any more and they are easy to find. Find out what other supplies they use to run their business. Do they use Styrofoam where they could use FSC paper or cardboard instead? Are they using a lot of disposable items when reusable items might do just as well?

ENERGY USAGE

The biggest energy users are heating and cooling. Is it practical to reduce those costs in any way? Maybe there are two refrigerators that are half-full and could be consolidated. Or maybe they can turn the heat down or the air conditioning up a few degrees.

Ask what kind of lighting they have. You can buy an LED bulb that fits just about any fixture and the cost savings adds up quickly when compared to incandescent or halogen bulbs. Plus, they'll save on cooling costs in summer because LEDs emit a lot less heat.

For next-level eco-business owners, suggest they call their utility company and discuss how to move to 100% renewable power. Many utility companies have that option, though it can sometimes cost a little bit more.

WATER USAGE

Are there any hissing toilets or leaky faucets? Fixing those is the easiest way to lower water usage without making a big investment. The next thing is to just watch for wasteful water habits that could be changed. Do they clean the outside of the storefront with a hose? Could a broom work instead? Is water left running for extended periods of time? And then when the time comes to replace appliances like dishwashers or toilets, water usage should always be considered. They might spend more up front, but they'll make it up in water savings.

WASTE

Ideally, all businesses would compost and recycle most of their waste and throw very little away. Composting can be contracted like any other service. If a business is interested, they can even contact the neighboring businesses and see if there's a co-op for composting, or if they want to try to get a better deal from a composting service by registering together.

Bins for each type of waste should be accessible and clearly labeled. Employees should be knowledgeable about local recycling rules to make sure as much is recycled as possible.

CUSTOMERS

What is the business doing to encourage environmentally friendly habits on the part of their customers? Is there plentiful, secure bike parking? Do they give discounts if someone refuses a bag or brings their own? In a café or restaurant setting, is it easy for customers to recycle or compost their waste?

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Finally, what is the business doing in the community to help promote an Earth-friendly lifestyle? It could be as simple as tooting their own horn and letting the public know they are working on making their business greener. Or they could sponsor local environmental projects and initiatives, host local cleanups, or start a community group for local business owners to share best eco-friendly practices. They could even apply to become a Panda Ambassador.

Step 5. Share the positives (with permission)

If you learned that a local business is doing a lot, or even if you just had a productive conversation about what they could do, ask if it's OK to share that information online. If you get permission, share what they're doing and what they're working on with your followers on social media (and tag the business!), or with your local activist group if you have one.

No shaming here—this is pure encouragement to keep up the good work and spread the word. The positive vibes they get from the exposure might just convince them to keep working on this whole eco-friendly thing.

Step 6. Follow up

After your conversation, follow up with any additional information they requested, or just check in to see how things are going and whether they have any questions. Also, the next time you're hosting a Panda Ambassador event or fundraiser, extend an invitation! Keep in touch and try to increase their involvement in the environmental community.

When they have made some progress (or if they are already eco pros) ask them to share what they are doing for the environment with the general public. It's good for their business and it also raises awareness of the importance of environmental issues.

Step 7. Share your experience

Log onto the Panda Ambassador Facebook group and share your experience with outreach to local businesses. Were people receptive? What questions did they have? Do you have anyone interested in making real changes? What advice would you give other Panda Ambassadors looking to engage their local organizations?