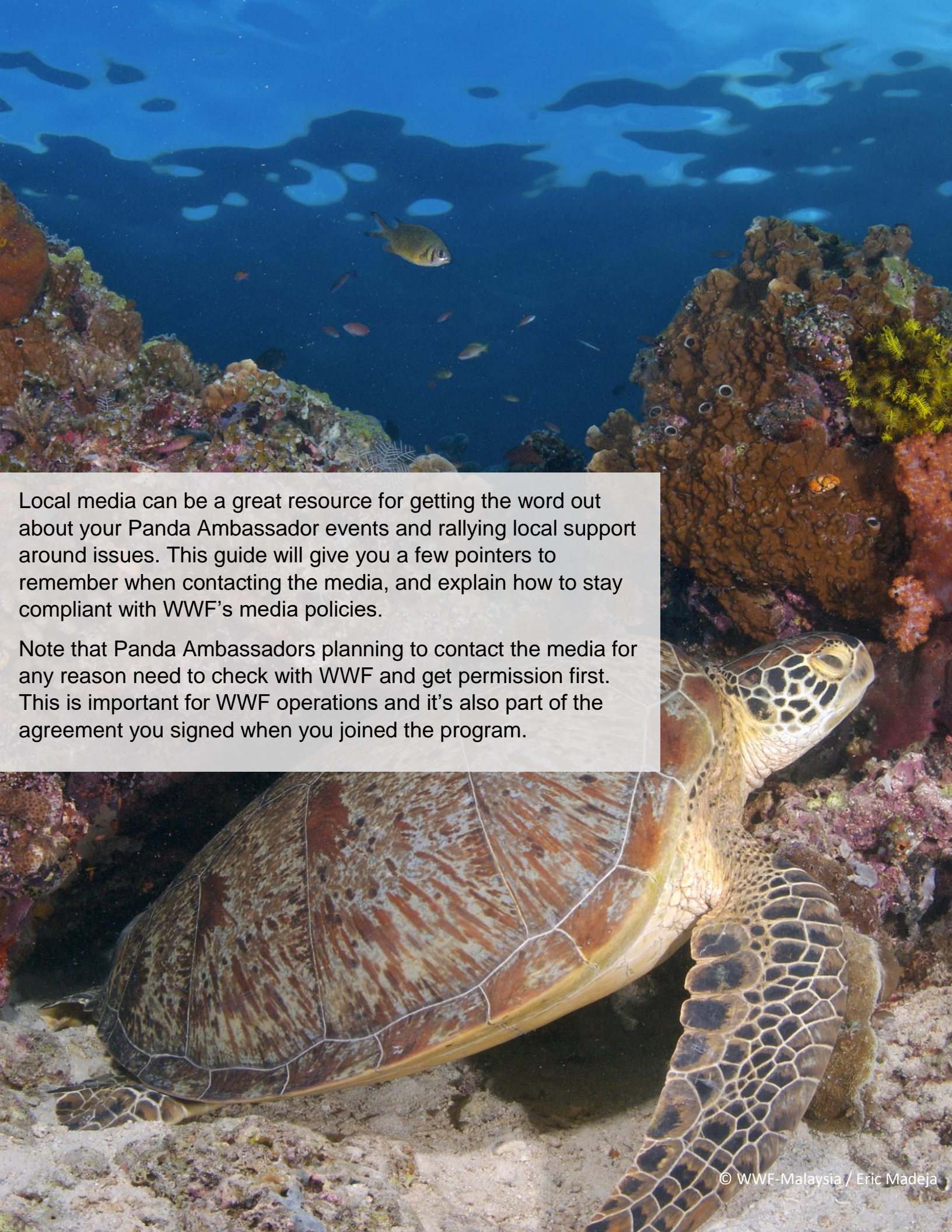




How to

**ENGAGE LOCAL MEDIA
AND REPORTERS**

Panda Ambassadors



Local media can be a great resource for getting the word out about your Panda Ambassador events and rallying local support around issues. This guide will give you a few pointers to remember when contacting the media, and explain how to stay compliant with WWF's media policies.

Note that Panda Ambassadors planning to contact the media for any reason need to check with WWF and get permission first. This is important for WWF operations and it's also part of the agreement you signed when you joined the program.

Who we mean by “local media”

For most Panda Ambassadors, local media refers to your local newspaper, local network news channel, weekly magazine, or community and neighborhood blogs. For Panda Ambassadors in major media markets like New York, Washington, Chicago, or Los Angeles, local media is limited to smaller organizations like alternative papers and neighborhood or community blogs. The reason for this is that WWF already closely manages all outreach to major national news outlets.

Why you might want to contact media

There’s no requirement for Panda Ambassadors to speak with local media. But there are a few cases where speaking to media can help get your message in front of members of your community who might not see it otherwise.

Events

A local article before your event can help start a buzz and encourage people to attend. This would have to be an event that’s open to the general public, where you would like to see some new faces. You can also invite media to attend your event, with the idea that they might write an article about it for publication afterward. This is useful for getting the word out to your community about your Panda Ambassador work, and it may also elicit local interest in your next project.

Environmental Issues

You could suggest a story to your local media outlet about a certain issue that you think is important and has a local angle. For example, you could ask if they are interested in writing a story about local impacts of climate change, or a story about where the city’s freshwater supply comes from and how stable and sustainable it is.

When contacting media is not appropriate

Politics

WWF is a strictly nonpartisan organization. While we advocate around specific issues and legislation, WWF would never endorse a particular candidate or political party for election. In your official capacity as a Panda Ambassador, you’re expected to adhere to that too. Using your position as Panda Ambassador to try to influence support for a candidate or party is strictly prohibited. In your personal life as a private citizen, you are free to support any candidates or political parties you like, but keep that separate from your work as a Panda Ambassador.

Issues unrelated to WWF’s work

Again, in your capacity as a Panda Ambassador you should stick to issues on which WWF works and has expertise. You may be personally invested in other issues of national importance—which is great. But bring out your Panda Ambassador credentials only when the issue is pertinent to WWF’s work and mission.

*Complex or
controversial
issues*

There are some issues WWF works on that are inherently so complex or controversial that we only want WWF experts or scientists speaking to the media about them. Our experts are trained specifically to do this while keeping the facts and WWF's message clear and understandable. For your own outreach ideas, steer clear of any issues that could be easily misunderstood or misconstrued.

If you aren't sure if your idea for media outreach falls into one of these categories, just ask us. Send an email to panda.ambassador@wwfus.org—which you'll need to do anyway—and we'll let you know whether your topic for outreach is appropriate.

Always check with WWF for permission before contacting media

Before you reach out to any local media, send an e-mail to panda.ambassador@wwfus.org. In this email, explain which specific local media outlets you want to contact, what you plan to say to them, and what you hope to accomplish. We'll review your message and work with our media and communications team to determine whether or not this fits in with our national media strategy. Wait to hear back from us before proceeding.

This is a critical step that helps WWF as an organization present a unified front to the public. We carefully plan all media interactions according to a set strategy. Your local outreach idea may have a place in that, or it may conflict with it. Either way, letting us know in advance prevents potential trouble down the road. It also allows us to give you the support and resources you need, and to track, promote, and celebrate your success!

If we deny permission to contact media, we'll do our best to explain why. There may be a lesson you can apply to your next idea, or it may just be that the timing isn't right.

If you get the green light

Once we give you permission to contact your local media, you can get started! Unless you have an existing relationship with a local reporter, most outlets—TV, newspapers, radio, and blogs—will have an address where you can send news tips. You should be able to find that with a little digging on their website.

Send a message to that address explaining who you are, that you are part of WWF's Panda Ambassador program, and that you have a story idea or an upcoming event. Write no more than a couple of paragraphs, getting quickly to the point about why this idea or event would make a great story. Only contact outlets that you've previously cleared with WWF. If you come up with other outlet ideas, you'll need to contact WWF again for permission.

Reporters around the country have one thing in common: They're busy. If you don't get a response within two or three days, you can send a followup to make sure they saw your message. If you don't hear back after that, you can assume they aren't interested.

Sometimes you won't hear back from a reporter, but they will show up at your event anyway! Or they'll take your story idea and run with it, without ever contacting you. They might get back to you requesting to speak with a WWF expert, which is fine. Just let us know and we'll facilitate.

If you do hear back about your event or story idea, send an email to panda.ambassador@wwfus.org and let us know what they say—if they're planning to attend your event, cover your story idea, or even if they've decided to pass.

Tips for talking to media

If the stars align and your local reporter decides to cover your event or issue, they may also want to interview you. Here are a few tips to make sure you get your message across and keep your foot out of your mouth.

- Know your main message. This should be a simple one-sentence point that you want the reporter to walk away knowing. During an interview you can say, “the main point I want to get across is...” and state your main message. If you ever get flustered, confused, or don't know what to say, just go back to your main message.
- Be ready to explain the Panda Ambassador program, how you are affiliated with WWF, and why you wanted to join.
- Admit when you don't know something. Say you'll have to look that up, or you'll need to check with WWF, or you just aren't sure. Admitting you don't know is much better than guessing or assuming.
- Everything is on the record. In movies you'll see people say to reporters, “This is off the record.” Well, that doesn't work in real life. Anything you say to a reporter could end up being used in the final story. So don't say anything you don't want attributed to you.
- Stay clear of controversy, politics, and unrelated issues. If you get a question out of left field that has nothing to do with your event or topic, you don't have to answer. You can just say that you're not really an expert in that, so they should speak to somebody else. And then go back to your main message. If they ask for your opinion on controversial or political topics, you can say that you don't think it's appropriate to answer in your role as a Panda Ambassador, but that you hope anyone who is interested will review the science and make up their mind based on facts.
- Remember that you are representing WWF. Use common sense and don't say anything in an interview that would be inappropriate, offensive, or contrary to WWF's mission and message. We know you won't, but a reminder never hurts, right?

Follow up with WWF

After your interview or event, let us know how everything went, whether there are any followup questions for our experts, and when the story will come out. Send us a link to the story if it's available online.

Share your experience

Log on to the Panda Ambassador Facebook group and tell everyone how your foray into media relations went. Did you get the article you were hoping for? Did a reporter show up to the event, interview everyone, and then ... nothing? It happens! Maybe you learned that working with media is not something you want to do again. Or maybe you had a great experience and think you'll be able to get news coverage on some of your future events. Whatever your experience, share it with your fellow Panda Ambassadors.