

A Guide to Organizing an Ethics Bowl in Canada



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Note: text items in blue are clickable URLs, and text items in magenta are clickable links to documents included in the resources package coming with this guide. For the magenta links to work, you need to have downloaded the zip file, not just the PDF you're currently reading.

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1 A short introduction

This document is for potential organizers of an Ethics Bowl, as part of the Canadian High School Ethics Bowl (CHSEB). Before doing anything else, visit ethicsbowl.ca; this is the official website of the Canadian High School Ethics Bowl. It contains a lot of information and many documents that will assist you in becoming a successful organizer of an Ethics Bowl. The website contains two main pages:

- i) The [About page](#) contains the basic information. It answers the following questions:
 - Why an Ethics Bowl?
 - What is an Ethics Bowl?

It also contains feedback from participants. As a potential organizer, you will often be asked ‘how does an Ethics Bowl differ from a debate’? This page answers this question as well.

ii) The [Organization page](#) contains the details of how an Ethics Bowl works, and how to organize one. If you have access to a color printer, I suggest that you print a copy of the [CHSEB Guide for Educators](#), as you will constantly refer to it. It is a 56-page document that contains a wealth of information such as:

- The rules and procedures of an Ethics Bowl.
- How to organize an Ethics Bowl.
- The criteria of evaluation.
- Sample cases.
- How to organize training sessions, etc.

Some of the information presented below duplicates the information available on the Ethics Bowl website. But importantly, this guide is **not a substitute for the official Guide for Educators**. Ideally, both should be consulted. This being said, I’ve added additional information that will be useful to new organizers, selected based on my experience as a new organizer. Moreover, the document introduces potential organizers to other resource items I’ve developed. The idea is to go through problems, questions, and tasks associated with the organization of an Ethics Bowl in the order in which they are likely to be encountered, thus providing something like a step-by-step assistance to new organizers.

2 Organizing an Ethics Bowl: An outline

One of the daunting problems associated with organizing an Ethics Bowl for the first time is that you may not even know what questions need to be answered, since you perhaps know relatively little about the Ethics Bowl. One of the additional complications is that there are **different levels of involvement** associated with Ethics Bowls, and so it’s possible to have significantly different agendas from one location to another. But there are constants, so let’s start with the fundamentals.

2.1 The seven fundamentals

Below I outline the main things you **minimally** need to think about as an organizer:

1) Learning what the Ethics Bowl is, and what a match looks like.

Odds are that you may never have even *seen* an Ethics Bowl, and now you are tasked to organize one. I was in this situation! You should consult the [CHSEB Guide for Educators](#), especially pages 16-18. But nothing is quite as useful as seeing one happen with your own eyes. Unfortunately, there is no good-quality video of a full match of

the CHSEB available online. An alternative is to look at matches of the US high-school Ethics Bowl, which are quite similar (make sure you look at the high-school version, not the college-level one). I recommend this [short introductory video](#) produced by UNC, and their [slightly longer presentation video](#). Finally, it is worth investing 50 minutes to watch the [entire video of the 2018 US National final](#).

- 2) Recruiting teams from local high schools for your Ethics Bowl, and volunteers (helpers, judges, and moderators).

See section 3 for details.

- 3) Organize training sessions.

See section 4.1 for details about a training sessions for participants (teachers and students). See section 4.2 for details about a training session for helpers, judges, and moderators.

- 4) Make the event run smoothly on the big day.

See section 5 for details.

- 5) Assist winning teams for their participation in the National (if applicable).

For this, you will need to get in touch with Estelle Lamoureux, organizer of the National CHSEB. In its minimal state, there is nothing more to this step than that. However, you may want to attend the National yourself, and maybe you will want to help teams in their fundraising efforts.

- 6) Write a follow-up report.

It is very desirable, if not categorically imperative, to produce a good post-event report. It is a way of letting people know how the event went, who was involved, and what the results were. This is probably your best promotional tool for next year's Bowl! Make sure to circulate it widely, using all the contacts you used at the recruitment stage. I suggest using colors, nice formatting, and including many photos. Make sure everybody is positively represented, so that they want to participate again. (If you're a faculty member, you will want to include this in your salary review or promotion portfolio.)

As an imperfect but acceptable example, see the [event report for the 2019 SFU Regional](#).

Based on my experience, those are the seven fundamental items. There are additional things that can be considered as add-ons, depending of what additional forms of involvement you're considering. But I'll leave that out now and maybe include it in an updated version of this guide.

2.2 Timeline

When should those things be done? There will likely be variations among Ethics Bowls. Moreover, in smaller Ethics Bowls that are just getting started, it may be required to make significant changes to the ideal timeline, in order to accommodate circumstances. Below, I describe two timelines—an ideal timeline, and one that’s not optimal, but just fine.

Organizational items	Ideal timeline	Fine timeline
Soliciting participation	May & June	May to September
Teams registration	August to early October	Up to late October
Participants training	Mid-October	Late October
Recruiting volunteers	October & November	November-December
Training volunteers	Late November	Early January
Your Big Day (the Regional)	December	January or February
The National	April	April
Post-event report	Early May	Early May

In our first year at SFU, we started the whole thing in January, and managed to have a Regional in mid-April and teams at the National by April 25. This is not ideal and not recommended, but it’s doable. So, don’t let this timeline guide be in the way of organizing an Ethics Bowl even if you’re starting late!

3 Recruitment

The recruitment of new high school teams is best thought of in two parts: (1) getting people to know about the Ethics Bowl and manifest interest in it, and (2) presenting a sales pitch and closing the deal, to use retail sales terminology. We’ll discuss each of them in turn in this section.

3.1 Soliciting participation by advertising the event

Firstly, in order to advertise your Ethics Bowl, you will need some promotional material. I recommend something simple, such as a flyer or a printout of a short slideshow. The purpose of the **promotional flyer** is to make people want to learn more about the Ethics Bowl, not to provide an exhaustive description of the Ethics Bowl and its many benefits. So, it should be short, colourful, and not overly text-heavy.

As education is of provincial jurisdiction, people in the K-12 system will be familiar with different jargon in different provinces. So, for the sake of effective communication, the promotional flyer should be customized to reflect the nature of the education system in your province. As a result, I suggest to do the following:

- (a) Try to find a statement of the mandate of the public school system in your province. It’s likely to fit perfectly well with the Ethics Bowl.

- (b) Provincial curricula are normally structured around some core items. For example, in BC, the curriculum focuses on the development of so-called “core competencies” (including critical and creative thinking). You’ll likely be in a position to claim that the Ethics Bowl is the perfect activity to foster the development of such competencies (or higher-learning, or engaged citizenship, or whatever your province sets as the goal).

In my experience, this is a strong selling point, since teachers, department heads, principals, learning coordinators, etc. typically have to implement or develop activities that promote such aims, but are often unsure how to proceed. Here, you’re basically serving it on a silver platter, making their jobs easier. As an example of what this could look like, check out the [5-page SFU flyer](#) I’ll be using this year. We also distribute to participants a [banner](#) that shows the benefits of participating in the Ethics Bowl.

Now, to whom should this flyer be sent, and how do we find them? I suggest using a mailing list software to create a permanent email list to which you’ll add contacts as you find them. Here are good places to look for contacts:

- Teachers you know personally, if any.
- Teachers that your colleagues know (send a mass mail to ask for their contacts).
- Teachers that your acquaintances know (post a request on your social networks).
- Find who the learning coordinators in nearby school districts are. I promise that they’ll love the Ethics Bowl, and they know who the keen teachers are.
- Find who runs your provincial Social Studies teachers association and contact them. They will likely be willing to advertise the event with their substantial mailing list and/or Facebook group. In BC, the BCSSTA has been extremely supportive.
- Find out whether there are conference series, research groups, or centres at your institution that may have contact lists that they may be willing to share.

The good news is that **you only need two teams to start a Bowl**, so there’s no need to be in touch with so many people. But as you try to grow your event, those are all good places to look.

3.2 Recruiting teams

Following this first advertisement phase, some teachers will (hopefully!) get in touch with you to obtain more information. I think this is the crucial step to getting them to commit to organizing a team. So, even though you could simply send a generic email with additional information, I suggest that you have a live conversation with them, either by phone or videocall. If many teachers show interest, then it may become a bit onerous; in this case, I found that a videocall with 3-4 teachers at a time is ideal. You can also try to organize an in-person meeting, but at this stage, when they have not really committed yet, I think this is often both inefficient and difficult to schedule.

What should this **live conversation** be about? Here are a few things that, I think, should always be included:

- (a) A very brief history of the Ethics Bowl (check out the [Wikipedia page](#)). Mention that in contrast to the US version, our Ethics Bowl is better (e.g., it is for public schools, and it puts more emphasis on collaborative engagement and listening in scoring criteria).
- (b) Run them through how a round is structured.
- (c) Go over the **key words** to give them a good feel for what the Ethics Bowl is about.
- (d) Distinguish the Ethics Bowl from other forms of debate club. A slogan that's worked well for us is to say "it's in many ways similar to a debate club, but more cooperative and focused on community solutions rather than defeating one's opponent." Stress that it's not about rhetorical flurries (though it develops rhetorical abilities), that it's not oppositional (the teams don't need to maintain opposing theses), but rather that it's a collaborative process to find a good answer to the question (study of cases for months ahead of time, encourages listening and awareness of diversity of views, cross-examination by judges).
(The [Model United Nation](#) (MUN) event is becoming increasingly popular, so having ready-made points of comparisons is a good idea, in case they ask.)
- (e) Give them an outline of the timeline.
- (f) Do a period of Q&A. At this stage, it's likely you won't know all the answers to the questions they'll ask you; that's fine, they'll understand.

I had a number of those sessions in my first year as an Ethics Bowl organizer. I didn't manage to convince everybody; and some will be convinced, but unable to participate for various reasons. Keep in mind that it's a non-trivial time investment for those already very busy teachers, so it's important not to make it feel like there's a mountain to climb. Rather, try to make them feel that there's this opportunity for a minimal time investment that will bring great fun and rewards.

3.3 Recruiting volunteers (helpers, judges and modetators)

It is important to plan the recruitment of volunteers early on. There are three main categories of volunteers:

1. Helpers

They will help you direct people to the right place, do registration in the morning, gather scores from judges, coordinating lunch, and ensuring that the event runs smoothly. The bigger your event, the more you need. But in addition to you (the event director), you should recruit at least one, and ideally two helpers.

2. Moderators

There is one moderator for each match (that is to say, your number of teams divided

by two). They make sure that the match runs smoothly, following the rules of the Ethics Bowl. Try to select dynamic and charismatic individuals as moderators.

3. Judges

You will need three judges for each match (that is to say, your number of teams divided by two, times three). Judges will be tasked with carefully listening to the teams, asking them proving questions, applying the scoring criteria to determine a winning team, and writing feedback for the participants. You can ask anybody who will have sufficient judgement to do so. I have found it easiest to recruit local instructors and graduate students (that makes a nice CV item, especially for students), but there are good reasons to cast the net more broadly.

The table below provides examples that will help you determine how many volunteers you need:

Volunteer type	Number of participating schools		
	4	10	20
Helpers	2	2	3
Moderators	2	5	10
Judges	6	15	30
Total	10	22	43

4 Training sessions

You will need to organize a training session for the participants, and one for the volunteers. It is possible to run both simultaneously, or even to do it online. Here is an example of a [slideshow](#) I've used in joint sessions. If you do it online, there are again a few different formats you can adopt. You may decide to do an interactive session (e.g., using Youtube streaming), or you may decide to record a workshop and upload it. Whether or not you organize a live session, having a recorded version is desirable, since there will often be people missing out (see, e.g., the [Youtube session](#) I've uploaded to my channel).

4.1 For participants (teachers and students)

In your training session for participants, you can include only teachers coaching a participating team, or you may include the students on participating teams. Either way, here are some topics that should be included:

- A brief history of the Ethics Bowl (include photos of past events)
- What it is, and what it values (including keywords)
- The distinction between the Ethics Bowl and traditional debates

- Where to find more resources
- How a tournament and a round unfold
- A sample case and question
- A general description of what judges will do and look for, plus an explanation of the following hard rules:
 - No prepared written notes are allowed.
 - No downloading device is allowed.
 - Team coaches are not allowed to interact with the team during a round.
 - During a round, students can exchange written notes but must remain silent, unless it's their time to confer.
 - Students must introduce themselves at the beginning of the round.
 - Winners of a round are determined by the number of judges voting for a team.
- Specifics about your Ethics Bowl (including a timeline)
- A Q&A session.

Optionally, and if time allows, you can simulate a round so that everybody has a good feel for it.

4.2 For helpers, judges, and moderators

In your training session for volunteers, the following topics should be discussed:

- A brief history of the Ethics Bowl, including the location of other Regionals, and the structure of the National.
- Where to find more resources.
- The distinction between the Ethics Bowl and traditional debates: specifically, that not only should participants make good arguments, but that they should manifest active listening, as well as collaborative and respectful behaviour. If they are instructor, they shouldn't judge it as they would grade an essay: the social interaction component matters.
- How a tournament and a round unfold, and what specific tasks moderators and judges have.
- A general description of what judges look for, plus an explanation of the hard rules mentioned above for the participant training.

- A detailed examination of the judging criteria and the scoring sheet (available on the official Ethics Bowl website).
There will always be some level of judging discrepancy. Make sure to have a group discussion that will minimize it.
- Specifics about your Ethics Bowl (including a timeline)

Again, if there's time, simulating a round would be a good idea.

5 The Big Day of the Regional tournament

To ensure that your Big Day goes well, the key is to rigorously prepare ahead of time. Make sure your helpers are very familiar with how the day will go. Let us start with what needs to be done the earliest, and then move forward to the main event. In the month or two prior to your Regional tournament, some items need to be taken care of:

- Finalize team registration.
- Finalize the recruitment of volunteers (as you will know the number of participating teams).
- You should book a sufficient number of rooms months ahead of time. Book more than is needed, since additional teams may request to participate at the last minute, or some rooms may be found unsuitable on the day of the event. Include a room for volunteers, and a large room that will serve as rally point.
- Book any A/V equipment you may need (at least a projector in the rally point room). You may also need microphones and cameras. If you wish, book a photographer.
- Consider that minors may need to sign a media release form to allow you to take pictures and videos (check with your institution).
- If you elect to have some, you should order trophies or medals for the winning and the finalist teams.
- If you elect to have some, you should order tokens of appreciation for volunteers.

About three-four weeks before the event:

- Finalize the lunch arrangements.
- Double-check your room bookings.
- Prepare a detailed schedule for the participating teams, judges, moderators, and helpers.

- Prepare a question related to each case that was provided to you (cases are provided, but you formulate the questions).

In the week prior to the event:

- Print all the material you will need for the day of the event, including
 - Posters with directions to put around campus
 - Floorplans to help participants find rooms
 - A detailed schedule for each participant and volunteer
 - For each round, a copy of each case together with the question (unknown up to that point) for each participant, moderator, and judge.
 - A scoresheet for each judge (that includes the score of both teams)

You also need a way of displaying results (either on a projector, blackboard, or on a printed crosstable).

- Ideally, for moderators and judges, prepare a folder with their material for the entire day (i.e., schedule, room assignment, cases & questions, scoresheet).

On the day of the event, if your preparation has been rigorously done as explained above, things should run smoothly.

- Have your helpers arrive at least one hour before the beginning of the round to set up registration (making sure teams are showing up as they registered). For the rest of the day, have your helpers run around so you don't go nuts (including gathering scores at the end of rounds).
- An [example of a schedule for the day](#) is included.

6 Asking for resources: Who to ask, and what to ask

As an organizer, you will need to get some source(s) of funding for the event. If you have a small Ethics Bowl with just a few teams and you do most of the work, it can be organized for as little as \$300-\$400 dollars. You could just charge a registration fee to the teams, and it would cover everything. However, it is advisable to send out a few requests for funding to have more resources available. If you are affiliated to a university, you probably should send a request to your Chair, Dean or Associate Dean, and perhaps to the Provost's office. Your faculty or campus' recruitment office might also be very willing to contribute; universities and colleges spend an increasing amount on recruiting and marketing, and they often are welcoming of new ideas. To do so, you'll need to submit a budget proposal. Here's an example of what such a proposal could look like:

Expense item	Mininal budget	More inclusive budget
Rooms booking This could include a few rooms you get for free, up to rooms you pay for, such as an auditorium that you use as rally point and for the finals.	\$0	\$400
Lunch for kids & volunteers Pizza is probably the cheaper and more convenient option, with drinks brought in from the grocery store. If you use campus catering, it will be closer to \$15 per person.	\$6 per person	\$14 per person
Printing This includes promotional material (can be in glossy color or cheap black-and-white), as well as the packages for judges and moderators (40-50 pages per person).	\$25	\$125
A/V and media That's strictly optional. But perhaps you need to pay for A/V, or need a photographer, or video-recording of the event, and maybe you want edited videos, including interviews with participants. Check your campus' rates.	\$0	\$5000
Communications That may include infographics services, webmaster, redaction & dissemination of press communiqués, etc. I'm not sure how those things cost, but it can be in the budget.	\$0	\$2000
Tokens of appreciation for volunteers & coaches You don't need to do it, but it doesn't hurt.	\$0	\$20/pp.
Trophies or medals You need those for finalists (up to 8 on each finalist team, including the coach).	\$6/pp	\$25/pp.
Participation prizes This could be a small university-branded item, a T-shirt, a book, etc.	\$0	\$20
Miscellaneous As a first-time organizer, budget for the unexpected. That's perfectly justifiable.	\$100	\$500
Finalist team going to the National in Win-nipeg You don't need to pay for that; the team(s) can pay. But why not include it in a more optimistic budget?	\$0	\$4200
Travel subsidies for participating teams Again, the teams can pay for that. On a more maximalist budget, however, you could include money for travel (e.g., mileage, bus, etc.) and hotel rooms for more distant teams that need to travel.	\$0	\$3,000
Assistant position Again, not strictly needed, but it may be helpful to (1) manage correspondence with teachers (even parents!), volunteers, co-organizers; (2) research the benefits of participating in the Ethics Bowl; develop a formulaire to obtain feedback from participants; (3) develop resources to assist teachers coaching a team; etc.	\$0	\$6800
Total expenses: Minimal budget based on 4 teams (so, 25-32 participants, plus 7 volunteers), more expansive budget based on 12 teams (96 participants plus 20 volunteers).	\$455	\$24,449

For income, you could consider items such as the following:

Income item	Minimal budget	More inclusive budget
Registration fees		
Department		
Faculty		
Social studies teacher association		

As you see, there is plenty of opportunities for being creative! In my first year, I had 5 teams and the total cost was around \$550 dollars, covered in its entirety by my department. So, that was easy!

One more note: Instead of asking money from the Dean's office, you can also ask for logistic assistance with room booking, processing registration, and creation of promotional material. It's normally part of what their outreach and recruitment team can do quite efficiently.

7 Acknowledgements

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