

RESEARCH ARTICLE

How do developed countries motivate volunteering: A comparative analysis of national recognition awards for volunteers in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, and Ireland

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Abstract: Purpose: With the rapid growth of volunteering in worldwide, the question of how to recognize volunteers at the national level to motivate volunteering has become a pressing matter. In a few of developed nations, volunteering is motivated by the establishment of national recognition awards for volunteer. As a result, the goal of this paper is to aid decision-makers in enhancing volunteering by drawing on the experience of these developed countries. Methods: This paper adopts a literature-based approach and presents a comparative analysis of national recognition awards for volunteer in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, and Ireland. The comparison factors include the objectives of awards, categorization criteria, eligibility prerequisites, nomination requirements, and the evaluation process. Following that, an examination of similarities and differences between the awards will be presented, and the article will end with some suggestions. Results: Each of these four countries has established standardized and effective criteria for volunteers' recognition awards, despite that each country's practices vary to some extent. Based on these circumstances, nations conscious of the importance of volunteer recognition which should expedite the establishment of national recognition awards for volunteers, broaden participation, focus on the effectiveness of service, establish reasonable application standards while ensuring the transparency of the selection process, and actively seek to expand cooperation with other social organizations.

Keywords: volunteering, volunteer motivation, volunteer recognition, motivation theories, recognition models

1 Introduction

“Volunteering” refers to voluntary actions that benefit individuals, groups, or institutions [1]. Globally, “volunteering” is an essential part of contemporary society and play a significant part in environmental protection, community development, and disaster relief etc. throughout the past decade. In China, with the proposal of “The Third Distribution”, volunteering has even assumed significant value. As “volunteering” gains popularity in several other regions of the world, the question of how to recognize it to promote its normality, sustainability, and long-term development has become urgent.

As an example, the Chinese government has consistently prioritized, as part of its Party policy, the construction of a system to acknowledge volunteers and their contributions. Article 32 of the Volunteer Services Regulation promulgated by the State Council in 2017 states that “volunteers and volunteer organizations that have made outstanding contributions to the development of volunteering shall be commended and recognized [2]”. In addition, numerous local governments, including Hunan, Jiangsu, and Guizhou, have introduced documents on volunteer rewards to develop an efficient recognition system.

In contrast to the thriving policy practice, most of literature on volunteering has concentrated mostly on its motivation and management, with little attention paid to its recognition. Volunteer recognition is an act of encouragement offered to those who undertake voluntary services in two complementary and mutually reinforcing ways: government and private. The former is not only more visible than the latter, but also more effective. By establishing a national volunteer appreciation award, the government expresses its dedication to volunteering and solves the issue of volunteer motivation. Until now, the majority of developed western counties have established a system of recognition for volunteers and their service, and some have even established national awards, which have facilitated the development of volunteering. Based on a comparison of the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Ireland, this paper illustrates how these developed nations recognize volunteers and aims to provide suggestions for improving volunteer incentives for nations seeking to strengthen their recognition of volunteers.

These four states were selected as research subjects due to their distinct volunteer incentive structures, which can serve as a diverse framework for volunteer recognition establishment. Regarding institutional systems, the major industrialized nations have both society-based and government-supported frameworks. The central governments of these four countries also have instituted national volunteer awards that are more in line with the Chinese system. Moreover, it has been found that the national recognition awards for volunteer created by these four nations have substantially raised citizen interest in volunteering. According to a report by the World Charity Aid Foundation (2021), these nations are among the leaders in terms of total volunteer hours donated [3]. According to a report by the World Charity Aid Foundation, these nations are among the leading level in terms of total volunteer hours donated.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Volunteer recognition and related models

The definition of volunteer recognition is still not be described consistently. Kwarteng defined volunteer recognition as “a formal and /or informal, favorable attention given to the volunteer to provide him/her a sense of appreciation, security, and belonging [4].” While Jung incorporated others’ opinions and conceptualized it as “an expression of gratitude or appreciation for volunteers’ contributions and an acknowledgment of the inherent value of volunteer activities [5].” With this context, in this paper, volunteer recognition can be viewed as an acknowledgment of value created or contributed by volunteers.

As volunteers generally become the most important group of customers for a voluntary organization [6], most of the literature on volunteer recognition is written from the viewpoint of nonprofit organizations or programs. It also become the central component of nearly every model of volunteer administration. This section will briefly describe the models’ characters and illustrate the function of recognition in each. These models include the ISOTURE model [7], the Bridge from Dreams to Reality Model [8], the Volunteer Professional Model for Human Services Agencies and Counselors [9], the 4-H Leadership Development model [4], the L-O-O-P model [10] and the GEMS Model of Volunteer Administration [11].

The ISOTURE model intend to emphasize that volunteer leadership development is a continuous effort which includes seven management sub-processes or phases (identification, selection, orientation, training, utilization, recognition, and evaluation) [7]. Identification of potential volunteers and leaders inside the organization is the initial process. Selection should be then conducted by interviewing to match potential volunteer’s knowledge, attitudes, and interests. Proper orientation provides volunteers with an opportunity to become familiar with the organization and its mission as well as their specific responsibilities. Training equips volunteers with knowledge and skills which ensure their competence during the utilization phase. And the model ends up recognizing volunteer contributions and evaluating their performance and the whole program. In this model, recognition is viewed as a necessary process, which can be either extrinsic (tangible) or intrinsic (intangible), to encourage volunteers’ continuous participation.

The Bridge from Dreams to Reality is a twelve-component “bridge” in the shape of an arc [8]. It begins with a “dream” and progresses through the arc in a 10-step procedure. These ten steps were broken down into five processes: Plan, Organize, Staff, Direct, and Assess. Plan contains goals and objectives, whereas Organize consists of action plans and job design. Recruit, interview, and place are the three components of Staff. Direct is accountable for training and supervise. And Access procedure implies to evaluate. When the “dream” turns into the “reality”, the feedback occurs. And the whole steps are supported by recognition which involved in every model phase.

To better integrate community agencies needs with professional counselors, Lenihan and Jackson developed the Volunteer Professional Model for Human Services Agencies and Counselors in 1984 which is a process of assessment and integration [9]. This model takes recently emerged or formed agencies that are starting to provide volunteer programs as main targets, and can be distinguished from the two models mentioned above as it focuses specifically on the ones who participate in voluntary activities with community agencies after being encouraged by their subordinates or company. There are six stages existing in a “Y” formation in this model. Step one is an information gathering and assessment stage, during which the agencies reassess organizational needs and the professional counselor evaluate their talent and skills. In step two, the agencies identify its need and reckon the required time of professional volunteer. Step three involves approaching and interviewing prospective volunteer applicants. Negotiating an agreement with the volunteer professional is the fourth step. The volunteer task is completed in step five, and volunteers are recognized in step six. As for recognition, private letters or certificates of gratitude, as well as public gatherings or the media, can be used to express appreciation.

Designed specifically to assist 4-H volunteers, Kwarteng, Smith, and Miller conceptualized the 4-H Volunteer Leadership Development Program in 1988 [4]. This model consists of six circle-

represented components: recruiting, training, motivating, recognition, retention, and supervision. The definition of recruiting is the process by which 4-H club leaders enroll volunteers. Training consist of a series of items such as understanding program objectives, volunteers' needs, and the role of 4-H volunteer leadership which aimed to prepare the volunteer for their role as a 4-H club leader. Motivation includes the intrinsic and extrinsic drive that prompted a person to volunteer and maintains their interest in the 4-H organization as a leader. Recognition are the formal or informal acclaim bestowed upon a volunteer 4-H club leader to express appreciation. Retention was described as the measures used to reduce volunteer attrition. And agents' enabling acts that facilitate the activity of volunteer leaders constitute supervision.

The L-O-O-P Model is a leadership model for extension educators to guide volunteer or program effectively. L-O-O-P model, which can integrate programs flourish with volunteers' benefit, is acronym for locating, orienting, operating, and perpetuating [10]. The presence of arrows between concepts indicates that these phases are interdependent and intertwine. Locating includes two sub-process: selection process and recruitment process. In selection process, leaders should identify potential volunteers and discern their interests and requirements. The recruitment process involves matching volunteers with tasks and obtaining their agreement to complete them. During the phase of orientation, volunteers become acquainted with the organization and project in which they are participating. Leaders should clarify relevant laws, procedures, policies, benefits, expectations, goals, and objectives. Operating phase pays more attention to volunteer accomplishments and organizes learning opportunities. Perpetuating the involvement of volunteers need evaluation and recognition. And multiple methods of recognition should be utilized, tailored to their unique motivational patterns.

The GEMS Model is conceived by incorporating parts of previous models to deal with changing audiences, clientele and volunteer base [11]. In this model, Volunteer administration is depicted as a spiral to indicate that it is an ongoing activity. The concept has four major categories (generate, educate, mobilize, and sustain) which can be divided into 18 phases. Generate consists of six phases: assessing organizational needs, writing job descriptions, identifying, recruiting, screening, and selecting volunteers. After generating, educate category includes four phases for volunteers: orientating, providing protection, resource allocation, and teaching specific skills or knowledge. Mobilize, as the third categories, has three phases: engaging, motivating, and supervising. The category of "Sustain" includes five phases: evaluation, recognition, retention, and either redirection or disengagement. Recognition is conducted for volunteers' positive contributions which helps them feel their efforts are admitted by organization, program and clientele.

Such theoretical models have indicated the importance and necessity of volunteer recognition during every process of volunteer administration. Therefore, it is certainly worthwhile to explore how other developed western nations motivate volunteers through recognition in countries where volunteering is thriving.

2.2 From motivation to recognition

According to Fisher and Ackermans, charitable and nonprofit organizations, particularly volunteer centers, adopt recognition as a strategy for progress [12]. In addition, researchers demonstrated there is a substantial correlation between recognition activities and effective volunteer management program [13]. However, it remains unclear what theoretical factors made volunteer recognition so critically important.

The answer lies in the motivation of volunteers. Motivation is the theoretical and practical core of the realization and continuation of volunteer service [14]. There are several typical motivation theories in sociological research, which can be divided into content theories and process theories. Both types of theories focus on individual needs and rewards, process theories attempt to explain the mechanism by which needs are converted into behavior while content theories of motivation emphasis on needs description and help to discover the conditions that motivate people. As a comparative analysis of national recognition awards for volunteers, this paper chooses to illustrate several key theories, include Hierarchy of Needs Theory [15], ERG Theory [16], and Expectancy Theory [17].

Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which is depicted as hierarchical level within a pyramid, specifies five levels of human needs that motivate their behavior: physiological needs, safety and security needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs [15]. It can be divided into deficiency needs and growth or being needs. And the need associated with self-actualization, as growth needs, should not motivate behavior until the other four needs, as deficiency needs, are fulfilled [18]. It indicated that the lack of deficiency needs prevent individual from being, for example, volunteering. In contrast, individuals who have advanced to the self-actualization level will be more interested in personal development.

ERG theory, which consist of existence, relatedness and growth, is composed on the basic

of Maslow hierarchy of needs. The existence needs of theory are adapted from physiological and safety needs in Maslow's model. Relatedness includes the desire of belongingness and some esteem needs. And the growth needs of theory correspond with Maslow's esteems and self-actualization needs [19, 20]. The differences between the two theory is that ERG is a continuum process which those three needs can be satisfied simultaneously rather than start from the bottom as in hierarchy model [21]. But ERG theory has a frustration-regression process that the individual will be frustrated and regress to the lower needs level if the higher-level need seems unable to satisfy. In volunteering terms, it implies that if an individual's growth need is not satisfied, volunteer administrators could try more compensation to volunteers' relatedness need [22].

The preceding two theories are both defined in terms of egoism, such egoistic motivation is considered be associated with tangible recognition, physical outputs, and compensation expectations [23]. And the Expectancy Theory provides an explanation for such expectations regarding activity recognition. It assumes that the expectation for recognition will motivate individuals to engage in desirable behaviors [24]. Therefore, it can be deduced that external recognition and incentives could satisfy egoistic motivations and encourage longer periods of voluntary participation. The national recognition award for volunteers, as an honored prize, is intended to encourage volunteering activities and to boost the level of volunteer participation.

3 Volunteer awards of four countries

In the early 20th century, the governments of the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Ireland established national recognition awards for volunteer to promote the spirit of volunteering. In this section, we will investigate the recognition awards in these four nations from five different perspectives: objectives of awards, categorization criteria, eligibility prerequisites, nomination requirements, and the evaluation process.

3.1 United Kingdom: The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (QAVS), established in 2002 in the United Kingdom, is a prestigious award given to volunteer groups across the country. This award is officially administered by the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service Office, which recognizes outstanding community service and encourages the public to participate. QAVS are the highest honors given to local groups, equivalent to an MBE. Therefore, the awards are granted based on group's administrative regions, with no constraints on the quantity or level of subdivision [25].

According to the official website of award [26], the groups must satisfy up to 12 criteria. Participating groups must: (1) be made up of three or more people; (2) be based in the UK, Channel Islands or the Isle of Man; (3) have been in operation for at least three years; (4) have over half its volunteers eligible to reside in the UK; (5) be led by volunteers, not by paid staff; over half its members should be volunteers; (6) provide a specific and direct benefit to the local community. Besides, the participating groups must not: (1) have been nominated for a QAVS award in the past 3 years; (2) have already received a QAVS award; (3) operate as a national organization, as QAVS is aimed at local volunteer groups; (4) have fundraising or grant making as its primary focus; (5) be based within or in support of a public service, unless they have a separate identity from the public service organization; (6) operate solely for the benefit of animals, unless it can demonstrate that its work provides significant other benefits to the local community (for example, therapy pets).

In terms of nomination, QAVS is open from April to September. And only online nominations that fit the above criteria will be considered. To be included, the group must be nominated within the given time by an individual who is familiar with the organization's work but is not involved in its real operations, and it must pass the review of the evaluation panel. The procedure generally consists of four steps: (1) The recommender will assess if the group fits the eligibility prerequisites and whether he or she is qualified to be nominated. (2) The recommender will log into the official website and create a nomination account. (3) Two letters of recommendation will be submitted from individuals outside the nominated organization. (4) Submit the nomination information online, which includes the group's contact information, a description of the contribution, the recipients, and the reasons for recommending. The QAVS team will notify the referrer of the group's selection status once the preceding stages have been completed [27].

After the group has been included in the election, it still need to undertake a four-steps evaluation process. The candidate group's materials were initially given to the local assessment committee for consideration, and the committee's employees evaluated the organization on-site. Then, based on the evaluation results and the materials, the local evaluation committee picked the exceptional volunteer groups and reported the list to the national award committee. After deliberation, the national award committee established the candidate list. And the committee submitted the final list for Queen approval and announced the final reward before December [28].

3.2 United States: President’s Volunteer Service Award

The President’s Voluntary Service Award (PVSA) is the highest recognition for volunteer service granted by the federal government of the United States. This award was founded in 2003 by the President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation and is administered by AmeriCorps, the National Service Program created by President Clinton, in collaboration with Points of Light to honor volunteers who have encouraged others to serve. The PVSA is a non-meritorious award consisting of two categories: Annual Awards and Lifetime Achievement. It is awarded to outstanding volunteers. Volunteers may receive Bronze, Silver, or Gold award packages as part of the Annual Awards, based on their age and number of service hours over the previous year. Currently, only Certifying Organizations have the authority to offer awards. Because the official website does not publish a list of certifying organizations, and winners are certified by them, there is no fixed number of prizes [29].

According to its criteria, the President’s Volunteer Service Award primarily recognizes volunteer organizations and individuals. In terms of eligibility, only the following sorts of organizations are permitted to become Certifying Organizations: (1) Nonprofit organization; (2) Community-based organization; (3) Faith-based organization; (4) Business; (5) School (K12, college, and universities) or institutions of higher learning; (6) National Service programs; (7) Civic, fraternal or service organization; (8) Membership or trade associations; (9) Federal, state or local government agencies; (10) U.S. military and state entities abroad (i.e. U.S. military bases and U.S. embassies). In addition, the aforementioned sorts of organizations are essentially charged with the following 10 obligations: (1) Verify the volunteer hours required to earn the award; (2) Verify whether the candidates are American citizens or permanent U.S. residents; (3) Pay for the award cost and should not charge volunteers, as well as avoid selling awards with volunteers; (4) Receive and distribute the awards package to volunteer; (5) Take the e-course at least once in 12 months; (6) Establish standard operating procedures to guarantee that all eligibility requirements and other program criteria are met; (7) Conduct business ethically and without deception. Organizations that are the subject of a criminal investigation, indictment, or conviction are ineligible to apply; (8) If an awardee fails to meet the PVSA’s criteria, the award will be revoked. If the ineligibility information does not originate from Points of Light or AmeriCorps, inform both parties of any proposed revocation and the justification prior to initiating proceedings. (9) Provide Points of Light with a database containing all information on awardees and the year of the award, and certify annually that the database is maintained and up-to-date; (10) Recertify eligibility for the award if more than three months have passed between the approval and purchase of the award and the actual award date. In addition, the rule requires volunteers to be: (1) United States citizens or lawfully admitted permanent U.S. residents; (2) at least five years old; (3) provides acceptable service within a 12-month period (for annual Bronze, Silver, and Gold awards) and over a lifetime (for Lifetime Achievement awards). According to the official explanation, apart from the volunteer hours for national service projects that qualify for lifetime achievement awards, other behaviors such as donating funds, political lobbying, religious instruction, conducting worship service, proselytizing, serving as part of court-ordered community service, or serving only family members do not qualify.

Both volunteer individuals and entities striving to become certifying organizations are evaluated for the Presidential Volunteer Service Award. To become a certifying organization, the three stages below must be accomplished. (1) Complete the e-course beforehand; (2) Submit the application form and verification materials online; and (3) Wait for feedback (the application will be evaluated within 15 business days after submission). By becoming a certifying organization, a volunteer can evaluate the reward based on the total number of volunteer hours worked with the organization. Table 1 presents the hours required for each award category of Presidential Volunteer Service Awards [30].

Table 1 Hours required for Presidential Volunteer Service Awards

Age Group (year)	Bronze (hours)	Silve (hours)	Gold (hours)	Lifetime Achievement Award (hours)
Kids (5-10)	26-49	50-74	75+	4,000+
Teens (11-15)	50-74	75-99	100+	4,000+
Young Adults (16-25)	100-174	175-249	250+	4,000+
Adults (26+)	100-249	250-499	500+	4,000+

Source: <https://presidentalserviceawards.gov/eligibility>

3.3 Canada: The Sovereign’s Medal for Volunteers

The Sovereign’s Medal for Volunteers (SMV) is the highest award created by the Canadian government to reward volunteer contributions across a range of fields. The SMV program was

created in 2016 to replace the “Governor General’s Caring Canadian Award,” which was originally granted in 1995. It is Canada’s highest honor. Moreover, it is administered by the Chancellery of Honours, which reports to the Governor General of Canada [31].

The eligibility conditions for the medal depend on the recipient types and the certification of volunteer activity. As one of the Canadian Honours, the SMV can only be bestowed upon Canadian citizens or non-Canadians who have made a substantial contribution to Canada or Canadians. In addition, nominees should be devoted volunteers who have provided substantial unpaid service over time. Additionally, their service goes as far as possible outside the confines of their job or organization. Unpaid work implies that all volunteer contributions for the medal have received no monetary recompense. Volunteers must have over 10 years of voluntary experience in order to meet the prerequisites of sustained. Volunteer contributions and age will be examined for candidates with less than ten years of service. Significant means volunteer work not only have a beneficial and long-lasting effect on society, but also foster a sense of national pride.

Similarly, SMV employs an online nomination procedure. While both SMV and The Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service are part of the national honors system, SMV has neither a nomination period nor nomination conditions. Anyone is permitted to nominate and recommend volunteers at any point through the year. In addition to avoiding advocating volunteers whose efforts have received other honors, the nomination procedure involves the inclusion of the four types of information listed below: (1) Contact information for the nominator and nominee; (2) A brief description of the nominee’s contribution, including organizations, years of service, and volunteer role; (3) Contact information for two references who support the candidacy. In addition, a security instruction has been issued for the attached materials to protect the privacy of nomination information.

To ensure the validity of the nomination, SMV adapts a four-steps evaluation process: (1) Upon receiving a nomination, the SMV program staff will first determine whether or whether the nominee fits all three qualifying requirements. (2) The staff also reviews the contents of supporting materials and letters of recommendation and provides a brief biography for each nominee’s materials. If necessary, they will contact the organization. (3) An independent committee examines the biographies and gives recommendations to the governor general. (4) The Governor General would approve the list of candidates and bestow the medal. And award ceremonies are hosted throughout the year in communities across the nation. Given the possibility of a two-year gap between the award and the presentation ceremony, the recipient has the option of getting the SMV via mail within two months after winning the award. In most circumstances, lieutenant governors, territory commissioners, mayors, or charity organizations present the medal instead of the Governor General, who should do so [32].

3.4 Ireland: Volunteer Ireland Awards

In 2007, with the support of the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Government of Ireland, the Volunteer Ireland Awards were established as the primary annual initiative to recognize volunteers and their extraordinary accomplishments. The award is also administered by Volunteer Ireland, an organization for which the current Ireland president has served for many years as a board member and trustee [33].

As the “Volunteer Ireland Award” is not a part of the Irish honors system, there are separate categories for volunteer individual/duo, group, and manager. There are eight award categories for Individual/Duo: (1) Arts, Culture, and Festivals; (2) Campaigning and Activism; (3) Children and Youth; (4) Environmental and Animal Care; (5) Health and Wellbeing; (6) Safety and Emergency Services; (7) Social Inclusion and Community Support; and (8) Sports and Recreation. There are two sort of volunteer groups: (1) the small group category (three to twenty volunteers), and (2) the large group category (twenty or more volunteers). The Volunteer Managers established to recognize professionals who administer volunteer programs and direct volunteer groups. In addition, Volunteer Ireland Awards stipulate three quotas for each of the categories [34].

In contrast to the other three countries, Volunteer Ireland Awards participants are only required to meet two eligibility requirements. Participation in the contest and nomination for it are open to everyone as the first condition. The second thing to note is that, except for “Volunteer Manager” awardees, which can be either paid workers or volunteers, the other categories are limited to unpaid and voluntary activities. It is possible to nominate the same volunteer numerous times in this circumstance, but each nomination will be considered independently.

Similar to the United Kingdom and Canada, nominations for the “Volunteer Ireland Award” must be filed online between August and mid-October of each year. Volunteer Ireland Award is unique in that it does not have rigorous requirements for additional materials, such as recommendation letters. Volunteer Ireland retains the right to remove the nomination if the information is insufficient or illegible and is attached to the certification materials. In addition, the corporation may do background checks and contact the nominee’s educational institution. Volunteer Ireland,

the organization in charge of administering this award, is also responsible for its evaluation. Since candidates are selected from a range of public nominations, certification documents serve as the key evaluative factor. At this time, the award does not accept lobbying, and the judging panel will only make decisions based on the evaluated papers [35].

It is obvious from the analysis of these four awards that the initial goal of these four nations was to recognize and reward contributions to local volunteer work. Due to the unique nature of the awards, Britain and Canada have not further separated the categories. Countries limit awarding objects, volunteer participation, and the nature of services while setting eligibility requirements. In addition, except for the United States, which has embraced the institutional certification approach, the remaining three nations have adopted the online nomination-review system. In the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, the evaluation process places a significant emphasis on the review of supplied documents. Table 2 displays the overview contents of these four national awards.

Table 2 Overview of the four recognition awards

Countries	The United Kingdom	The United States	Canada	Ireland
Awards	The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service	President's Volunteer Service Award	The Sovereign's Medal for Volunteer	Volunteer Ireland Awards
Objectives	Commend contribution encourage involvement	Benefit society and inspire others	Commend volunteers' accomplishments	Commend volunteers' accomplishments
Categorization Criteria	No classification	Lifetime achievement Annual Awards	No classification	Individual/Duo Groups Volunteer Manager
Prerequisites of Eligibility	Group number, indigenous groups, operating years and volunteering characteristics	Organization types and duties, volunteer age and volunteering characteristics	Nationality, service years and volunteering characteristics	Volunteering characteristics
Nomination Requirements	Nomination-review	Organizational certification	Nomination-review	Nomination-review
Evaluation process	Local committee audit, national committee review, determine candidate list and Queen's approval	Pass the certification and select internally	Eligibility acquisition, material audit, committee review and the Governor's approval	Material review and company evaluation

4 Comparison of similarities and differences

According to a survey of these awards in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Ireland, it is evident that they were all created to recognize outstanding volunteerism and that they are independently examined, further showing their validity and authority. However, each of the four countries' awards has its own categories, participate methods, and eligibility restrictions. These similarities and differences are based on the award's objective and its volunteer culture.

4.1 Similarities analysis

4.1.1 The excellence of objectives

Despite the fact that all four countries have established numerous levels of volunteer recognition awards, national honors are the most notable. These awards seek to accomplish many goals, one of which is to encourage greater public participation. As each of these countries has a high level of public participation, which is predictable given that volunteering is embedded in each of their respective cultures. One of the additional objective is to recognize outstanding volunteer achievements, which may encourage volunteers with professional knowledge and abilities to utilize their expertise more effectively.

4.1.2 Independency of the evaluation process

A more credible evaluation process is one that adheres to the ideals of objectivity and impartiality, as opposed to one that is biased. There are two methods to evaluate the impartiality of the award evaluation. First, it allows professional organizations to conduct evaluations without government participation. In the United Kingdom and Canada, voluntary awards are presented in the names of the nation's top leaders. However, the actual review process is conducted by an independent committee, and the nation's top leaders are exclusively responsible for ultimate approval and awarding. In the United States and Ireland, only certifying bodies and nonprofits perform the evaluation process. Codified are the nomination system, evaluation criteria, and selection procedure. In the United Kingdom and Canada, volunteer award winners are certified by a local panel before being forwarded to a central review committee. In the United States, the Presidential Volunteer Service is administered by a certifying agency, which must first be accredited prior to selecting award recipients. In addition, awardees are evaluated based on their age group and quantity of volunteer hours. Volunteer Ireland, a non-profit organization, administers the Volunteer Ireland Awards, and the winner is selected by a committee in collaboration with the volunteer organization for which the nominee has served.

4.1.3 The authority of awards

In addition to formal recognition, awards are noteworthy for their authority. In most cases, the value of a volunteer recognition award is not determined by its monetary value, but by the prestige and sense of occasion associated with the award. In addition, authority emphasizes positive organizational and formal social evaluation. Recognition conducted primarily by the national government and frequently sanctioned, signed, and personally presented by the head of state during significant festivals in conjunction with media publicity, signifying gratitude and spiritual awards to the recipients. In presidential systems like the United States, Canada, and Ireland, the President is responsible for establishing and conferring the highest honors; in monarchies like the United Kingdom, the Queen is responsible for conferring the highest honors. Through these rituals, volunteering has become a widely recognized social activity in a specific setting, and it plays a critical part in reproducing and altering the construction and stability of social order, as well as the formation and maintenance of moral images [36].

4.2 Differences analysis

4.2.1 Categorization criteria

The classification of incentive rewards for voluntary service and the parameters under which they are created are significantly different in each of the four countries. Both the President's Volunteer Service Award in the United States and the Volunteer Ireland Awards are, however, broken down further into other categories. This is because countries like the United Kingdom and Canada have a merit-based honor system, and volunteer medals are national awards in such countries. In order to acknowledge a wider variety of accomplishments, the Volunteer Service Awards are broken down into several categories in both the United States and Ireland.

4.2.2 Participate methods

With the exception of the "President's Volunteer Service Award" in the United States, which employs the registration methodology of institutional certification, the other three nations have used the nomination-review method. In general, "nomination system" refers to the behavior of authorized individuals or groups who nominate and suggest likely-to-be-elected candidates prior to selection. Nonetheless, based on this principle, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Ireland have established audit criteria based on their own needs, establishing a "nomination-audit system". On the one hand, the "nomination-review procedure" eliminates the recommender-nominee interest correlation, ensuring the award's impartiality and fairness. In contrast, the adoption of audit standards successfully reduces audit costs and makes it easier to audit the material assets of special organizations.

4.2.3 Prerequisites for eligibility

The eligibility requirements for participation in the recognition awards for volunteer and their service varied among the four nations. First, the participation requirements are separated into individual and group categories. In the United States and Canada, only individuals may compete for the award, however in the United Kingdom, only groups are eligible. Individuals and teams are permitted to compete in the Volunteer Ireland awards. The minimum age and term of service for volunteers is the second consideration. To be eligible for recognition awards in the United States, volunteers must be at least five years old; in Britain and Canada, awardees must have between three and ten years of voluntary experience. The American Presidential Volunteer Award is limited to U.S. citizens and permanent residents, whereas the British, Canadian, and Irish awards are not limited to their own countries and have more obvious international components.

5 Conclusion and suggestions

Establishing and strengthening the national volunteer reward and recognition system is essential for fostering a moral trend of altruism. Moreover, it is an effective strategy for promoting social cohesion and garnering government support. While it is vital to begin with reality and follow a road with each nation's characteristics, incentives and recognition for volunteering should also keep pace with international practice and make full use of the practical experience of reward systems in developed nations. Therefore, we propose the following suggestions for recognizing volunteer service:

Suggestion 1: Promote establishment of volunteer recognition awards and strengthen corresponding legislative framework

On the basis of the preceding research, this research concludes that all four nations have established recognition awards for individuals or entities that have outstanding contributions to volunteering. The United Kingdom and Canada have also adopted the awards into their respective

national Honors Systems. As a result, it is suggested that volunteer service be integrated into the charitable recognition system and that a national honor system be constructed. Therefore, this study suggests that the other nations should establish national volunteer recognition awards, such as the National Volunteer Service Model and National Volunteer Award. In addition, this paper also recommends that countries with a higher percentage of volunteering participants incorporate volunteering into the design of a charity recognition system or even National Honour System, and develops a coordination mechanism for the honors system for volunteering in the Charity or Honours Law, including types of honours and selection criteria for volunteer recognition.

Suggestion 2: Clearly define the purpose of award and focus on its effectiveness

The volunteer awards of the four nations begin with their respective evolutions of volunteering and emphasize the recognition of extraordinary volunteer labor. In fact, volunteering is considerably less developed in the rest of the world's nations than the four nations listed above. Thus, for countries where volunteering is not as developed as the four nations or at the early development stage, the volunteer recognition award should strike a balance between encouraging ordinary public engagement and rewarding exceptional volunteer service achievements. In other words, there should be mutual benefit. Therefore, the reward could gradually grow toward professional volunteering, encouraging specialized teams or specialists to provide services that satisfy professional standards and emphasizing the efficacy of volunteer labor. Additionally, a stringent restriction on the total number of prizes must be established to preserve their significance and credibility.

Suggestion 3: Reduce restrictions to extend participation

The comparison of the voluntary service awards of the four countries demonstrates that, despite the disparities in eligibility restrictions, the guiding philosophy is to expand the area of participation. In order to maximize the leading potential of the awards and build a good climate of excellence pursuit throughout society, the government should loosen participation limits. Specifically, the implementation can be described as follows: Priority must be given to treating domestic and international residents equally. It helps enhance the internationalization of the awards and allows the nation to showcase its national image. Second, the awards should be granted not only to individual volunteers but also to organizations or groups that provide volunteer services, with an increased emphasis on the extraordinary nature of volunteering. Additionally, the age requirement for volunteer applications must be lowered to attract both younger and older individuals to serve as volunteers.

Suggestion 4: Conduct nomination online and clarify the selection process

Regarding the selection process, the national recognition awards for volunteers should also integrate online nomination. There are two possible explanations for this stance: (1) Since the United Kingdom, Canada, and Ireland implemented online nominations several years ago, the operation has been remarkably stable. (2) Online nominations promote a greater level of public participation and permit extensive use of online media for promotional purposes. In addition, each of the four nations has established and made public an exhaustive selection procedure. The other nations might learn from their experience and develop a rigorous, comprehensive, scientific, and fair selection process to improve the legitimacy and quality of awards.

Suggestion 5: Authorize professional review and cooperate with society

In contrast to Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Ireland have all formed partnerships between government and commercial forces and assigned the selection process to a professional organization. For example, the President's Volunteer Service Award is also supported by the non-profit organization "Points of Light", while the Volunteer Ireland Awards are administered by Volunteer Ireland. In addition, corporations and foundations can contribute to these national awards. For instance, The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service takes donations from The Garfield Weston Foundation, Sir Mark Pigott KBE, and ShareGift. The Irish Immigration Museum and Follin Foods also made contributions to the Volunteers Ireland Awards of 2021. Consequently, the establishment of national volunteer awards might be generated by the government and approved by expert organizations after inspection. In addition to building avenues of collaboration with the commercial sector, the award should market itself through utilizing social resources.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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