Major Marathon Charity Guide: Timelines, Fundraising Minimums & Deadlines

Dreaming of running a World Marathon Major but don't have a qualifying time—or struck out in the lottery? Charity entries are often the most reliable way in.

Below is a **practical, race-by-race guide** to how charity bibs work for the big six: Boston, New York City, Chicago, Berlin, London, and Tokyo. Fundraising minimums and timelines change every year, so treat this as a **pattern guide**, not a legal document—always confirm details with the race and your chosen charity.

Quick Snapshot by Race

Marathon	Typical Race Month	Charity Fundraising Range*	Key Application Window (Recent Pattern)
Boston	April	~US$7,500–$10,000+ (some >$20,000)	Charity teams often recruit from late summer / fall for the following April
New York City	November	≥US$3,500 (many $3,500–$5,000)	Lottery in February; charity teams begin recruiting around/after that
Chicago	October	≥US$2,200 (many $2,200–$2,500+)	Charity entries open early in the cycle and remain open until spots fill
Berlin	September	~US$3,000–$4,000 equivalent	Charity packages open once general registration/lottery is underway
London	April	~£2,000–£3,000 (some higher, some lower)	Ballot opens right after the race; charity entries rolling through the year

Marathon	Typical Race Month	Charity Fundraising Range*	Key Application Window (Recent Pattern)
Tokyo	March	Min JPY 100,000 (~US$650); many charities much higher	Charity entry usually late June–mid July, **before** the regular lottery

- Ranges based on current examples from official charity teams and large nonprofits as of late 2025. Always check your specific charity.

Boston Marathon (April)

Boston is both the hardest to qualify for and one of the most expensive to access via charity.

How Charity Entry Works

The Boston Athletic Association (B.A.A.) runs an **Official Charity Program** that gives invitational entries to ~190+ nonprofit organizations for the 2026 race. Those organizations then recruit runners who commit to a fundraising minimum.

Typical Fundraising Minimums

Minimums vary by charity, but current examples include:

- The B.A.A.'s own charity team requires at least **US$8,500** for the 2024–2025 cycle.

- Another Boston Marathon charity, Trinity Boston Connects, also sets an **US$8,500** minimum.

- Some high-profile charities set **US$20,000** minimums for their Boston teams.

Realistically, you should expect **US$7,500–$10,000+**, and be prepared for considerably more with certain organizations.

Key Timelines & Deadlines

- Boston typically announces its **Official Charity Program list** for a given year in early fall (e.g., October for the following April).

- Individual charities open applications on their own schedules but often **recruit from fall through early winter** for the race the following April.

- Many ask you to hit certain **interim milestones** (e.g., 50–80% of your goal before race day), with final deadlines a few weeks after the race.

TCS New York City Marathon (November)

NYC might be the most charity-friendly of all the majors in terms of structure and communication.

How Charity Entry Works

NYRR (New York Road Runners) runs an **Official Charity Partner Program** with different partner levels. Each charity sets its own fundraising minimum, but NYRR requires that minimum to be **at least US$3,500 per runner**.

Typical Fundraising Minimums

Examples from current 2025–2026 charity teams:

- Many official charities list **US$3,000–$3,500** minimums.

- Some large hospital foundations and marquee nonprofits require **US$5,000+**.

So in practice, plan for **US$3,500–$5,000** as a realistic band.

Key Timelines & Deadlines

- The **non-guaranteed entry drawing (lottery)** for NYC usually runs in **February** (e.g., Feb 11–25 for the 2025 race), with results announced in early March.

- Charity partners often start recruiting:

  - Early in the year (some before the lottery), and

  - More aggressively **after lottery results**, targeting runners who didn't get in.

- Many charities require:

  - 50% or so of your minimum by late summer/early fall,

- Full amount due in the weeks leading up to race day.

Bank of America Chicago Marathon (October)

Chicago offers one of the **lowest fundraising minimums** among the majors, making it a popular first charity marathon.

How Charity Entry Works

The Chicago Marathon has an **Official Charity Program**. Only charities in this program get guaranteed entries for their runners.

Typical Fundraising Minimums

- The official program requires each participant to raise **at least US$2,200**, though individual charities may set higher goals.
- Some charities list US$2,500 or more as their required minimum.

Expect **US$2,200–$2,500** as your baseline.

Key Timelines & Deadlines

- The 2025 Chicago Marathon is on **October 12, 2025**, with the 2026 edition on **October 11, 2026**.
- The general application window for non-charity entries can close months before the race; when that's done, **charity entries remain one of the last ways in.**
- Many charities close applications in **late winter or early spring** for the following October race, or sooner once their bib allotment is spoken for.

BMW Berlin Marathon (September)

Berlin is popular for its fast course and for being relatively accessible via charity compared to Boston or London.

How Charity Entry Works

The Berlin Marathon works with **official charity partners**. Runners who choose an official partner get a **guaranteed starting place** in exchange for meeting that charity's fundraising target.

Typical Fundraising Minimums

Minimums vary widely depending on the organization and country, but examples include:

- ASAN's (Autistic Self Advocacy Network) team for the **2026 Berlin Marathon** sets a **US$3,500** fundraising minimum.

- Other charities such as the Michael J. Fox Foundation and Free to Run set their own targets, generally in the **US$3,000–$4,000** range or equivalent.

Key Timelines & Deadlines

- Charity places typically open once the **general registration/lottery** process is defined for a given year.

- Many international charity partners recruit **9–12 months before race day**, with fundraising milestones spread through the spring and summer.

TCS London Marathon (April)

London is legendary for charity running. It regularly sets global records for one-day fundraising.

How Charity Entry Works

Runners can get into London by:

- Public ballot

- Good for Age (UK only)

- Travel partners

- **Charity places**

Charities receive an allocation of bibs and recruit runners who commit to fundraising targets.

Typical Fundraising Minimums

London charity minimums are usually quoted in pounds:

- Some major UK charities list **£2,000–£2,500** as their minimum fundraising target for a charity place.

- Others go higher; for example, some teams set **£3,000** (or US$5,000 for US-based charity teams).

- A few have lower or "raise what you can" expectations for runners who already have a ballot place.

A safe planning band is **£2,000–£3,000+** for a charity-place runner.

Key Timelines & Deadlines

- The **public ballot** for the next London Marathon typically opens **right after the current year's race** and stays open for about a week. For 2026, for example, media reports point to an April 26–May 2, 2025 window, with results notified in July.

- Many charities:

  - Open their application forms soon after the ballot closes.

  - Allocate places gradually from mid-year through the winter.

  - Require multiple fundraising milestones (e.g., 25% by January, 80% by race day).

Tokyo Marathon (March)

Tokyo is the most structurally different: the charity process happens **before** the general lottery and works more like a **silent auction**.

How Charity Entry Works

- The Tokyo Marathon Charity Program lets runners choose from dozens of participating organizations and pledge a donation.

- For the 2026 race, the program lists **39 organizations**, with a **minimum donation of JPY 100,000** to become a charity runner.

- In practice, runners "bid" a donation amount; higher commitments and strong personal statements often improve your chances of being selected. Runners and bloggers describe it as a "silent auction" style system, with typical successful bids exceeding the minimum.

Typical Fundraising Minimums

- **Minimum required donation:** JPY 100,000 (about US$650–$700, depending on exchange rates).

- Many charities set "recommended" or typical donation levels much higher, often **JPY 150,000–250,000+**, and some popular charities see accepted bids around **JPY 200,000 or more** in recent years.

You can fundraise that money back from others, but from Tokyo's perspective, **you are personally committing to donate**that amount.

Key Timelines & Deadlines

- The Tokyo Marathon charity entry window typically runs for a few weeks in **late June to mid-July** (e.g., June 26–July 13 for the 2024 cycle).

- After charity runners are selected and donations confirmed, the **general lottery** for non-charity entries takes place later.

- Payment deadlines are strict; if you don't complete your donation within the specified period (often within ~45 days), you can lose your spot.

How to Use This Guide

A few practical tips to make this guide actually useful:

1. **Pick your race, then work backwards.**

   Start from the race date (e.g., April for Boston/London, November for NYC) and note when lottery and charity windows usually open.

2. **Estimate your fundraising capacity.**

   - First-time fundraisers might aim for Chicago or Berlin.

   - Experienced fundraisers with strong networks might tackle Boston, Tokyo, or London.

3. **Research 3–5 charities per race.**

   Look up:

   - Their **fundraising minimum**

   - Whether they offer **coaching, events, or fundraising support**

   - How competitive their application process is (many ask detailed questions about your "why" and your fundraising plan).

4. **Watch for milestones and deadlines.**

   A lot of charities now require:

   - A percentage of your goal by a mid-campaign date

   - Full amount by race week or within a set time after race day

5. **Keep your story at the center.**

   As Robin's Tokyo experience shows, your **personal connection to the cause** and the quality of your written application can matter just as much as the number you commit to.