



Marketing Plan: Fit & Fund by AIRC

Table of Contents

Part 1: Market Landscape & Competitive Context

- 1.1. The Nonprofit Landscape in Italy and Gen Z Giving Trends
- 1.2. Competitive Analysis
- 1.3. Strategic Opportunity for AIRC

Part 2: PESTEL & SWOT Analyses

- 2.1. Pestel Analysis
- 2.2. SWOT Analysis
- 2.3. Strategic Implications

Part 3: Survey Results

Part 4: Product Presentation - The "Fit & Fund" App

- 4.1. Concept: "Move Your Body. Fund the Cure."
- 4.2. Key Features and User Experience
- 4.3. The "Fit & Fund" Universe Beyond the App

Part 5: Consumer Insights & Target Barriers

- 5.1. Understanding Gen Z: A New Paradigm of Engagement
- 5.2. Barriers to Adoption and Proposed Solutions

Part 6: Strategic Approach

- 6.1. Short-Term Strategy (Months 1-6)
- 6.2. Long-Term Strategy (Year 1-3)
- 6.3. Positioning Statement

Part 7: Strategy for Online Communication

- 7.1. Digital communication
- 7.2. Offline communication

Part 8: Plan for Budget and Resources

- 8.1. Budget for Operation
- 8.2. Spending Structure Example

Part 9: Managing Risk

Part 10: Long-Term Sustainability

- 10.1. Long-Term Sustainability
- 10.2. Financial and operational sustainability
- 10.3. Revenue diversification and partnerships
- 10.4. Transparency, Trust, and Brand Credibility
- 10.5. Ethical, Social, and Environmental Sustainability

Bibliography

Part 1: Market Landscape & Competitive Context

1.1. The Nonprofit Landscape in Italy and Gen Z Giving Trends

The Italian philanthropic market is a mature and competitive ecosystem, dominated by historical agents benefiting from a major recognition built on several decades of traditional media campaigns. For an organization like AIRC, which already benefits from a solid credibility in the scientific domain, but which is still perceived as distant, penetrating the Gen Z segment (people born between 1997 and 2010) is not an easy challenge. It requires not only an adaptation but also a total rethinking of its marketing approach, based on a deep understanding of the new giving dynamics that are less transactional and more relational.

Drawing mostly on the "Giving Italy 2023 - La Filantropia nel nostro Paese" report and the AIRC annual report, several key findings emerge: :

- **Low Brand Awareness for AIRC:** Spontaneous awareness of AIRC among Gen Z is currently low. Organizations like **Telethon** and **Emergency** enjoy stronger brand recognition. This lack of familiarity is due to a communication strategy historically focused on older donors through channels (television, print) that Gen Z has largely abandoned. AIRC's image is that of a serious and reliable institution, but it critically lacks the personality, agility, and digital presence needed to capture this audience's attention.
- **Interest in the Cause:** Despite low familiarity with the AIRC brand, medical research and health are among the top three causes that mobilize Gen Z. This latent interest is a massive opportunity. It is connected to a heightened awareness of mental and physical health and a fascination with science and innovation. A fertile ground therefore exists: an interest in our core mission, but a deficit in emotional and relational connection with our brand.
- **Evolving Giving Behaviors:** Gen Z has redefined the codes of generosity, moving away from the annual check to embrace a more fluid and integrated form of engagement. Traditional, one-off, high-value donations are being replaced by new approaches:
 - **Micro-Donations:** Small contributions (typically between €3 and €5) but more frequent, are preferred. Psychologically, this lowers the financial barrier and turns giving into an almost painless habit, similar to buying a coffee. It fosters a sense of continuous contribution without the pressure of a major financial commitment.
 - **Experiential Giving:** This generation prefers to give in exchange for an action, a product, or an experience. The act of giving must be tangible, participatory, and rewarding. It's not about buying a clear conscience, but about participating in a story, a movement. The donation becomes proof of personal commitment, a social trophy to be proudly shared.
 - **Radical Transparency:** Gen Z demands to know exactly where their money is going and the concrete impact of their contribution. Having grown up in an era of misinformation, their distrust of large institutions runs deep. Trust is not a given; it must be continuously earned with visual data, authentic testimonials, and direct access to information.
- **Discovery Channels and Payment Methods:** The main channels of influence are digital and social. **Instagram** and **TikTok** are the preferred discovery platforms, not through traditional ads, but through authentic content, viral challenges, and content creators. University events create an essential physical touchpoint to anchor the digital presence in the real world. For payments,

seamlessness is non-negotiable: the process must be invisible, one-click, via mobile wallets like **Apple Pay** and **Google Pay**. Any complex payment form is a guaranteed donation abandonment.

1.2. Competitive Analysis

AIRC is not just competing for donations, but for an even scarcer resource: Gen Z's attention and engagement. The competition is therefore both direct (other nonprofits) and, more significantly, indirect (any app or brand that occupies their time and mind).

- **Telethon:** The leader in brand awareness. Its strength lies in its annual telethon, which creates a national event. However, its image is highly institutional, and its primary format is seen as outdated by a generation that no longer consumes media linearly. Telethon is their parents' charity event, not theirs.
- **Emergency:** Strong recognition thanks to its visible humanitarian action and activist positioning. Its image is more modern and engaged, which appeals to Gen Z. However, its international scope can sometimes feel distant from the daily concerns of a young person in Italy, unlike cancer research, which can affect anyone, anytime.

1.3. Strategic Opportunity for AIRC

The competitive landscape, far from being a threat, reveals a major strategic opportunity and a vacant space. No major player has credibly positioned itself at the intersection of **physical/mental well-being**, **cutting-edge scientific research**, and **gamified digital engagement**. This is a "blue ocean" for AIRC.

Part 2: PESTEL & SWOT Analyses

2.1: PESTEL Analysis

The macro-environment surrounding AIRC's ambition to penetrate the Generation Z (Gen Z) segment in Italy is shaped by profound sociocultural and technological transformations, combined with evolving economic and regulatory dynamics that redefine how younger citizens engage with nonprofit institutions.

Political Factors

Italian public policy has historically been supportive of the nonprofit sector through tax deductions for charitable donations and national frameworks promoting civic engagement (Centro Nazionale per il Volontariato, 2023). However, the state's limited funding for scientific research places significant responsibility on private foundations such as AIRC to fill this gap. Political stability and EU-level health and innovation agendas enhance legitimacy for medical research foundations but also impose expectations for transparency and accountability. Any changes in fiscal incentives or donation-related tax benefits could directly influence donation behaviors, particularly among young professionals entering the workforce.

Economic Factors

Italy's economic environment remains fragile, marked by slow GDP growth and youth unemployment exceeding 20 % in several regions (ISTAT, 2024). Consequently, disposable income among Gen Z remains limited, constraining traditional high-value donations. Nevertheless, the diffusion of mobile banking and low-friction digital payments (e.g., Apple Pay, Satispay, PayPal) has lowered the perceived cost of micro-giving. Economic precariousness does not suppress generosity but transforms it: younger donors prefer frequent, low-commitment contributions integrated into everyday consumption patterns. AIRC's future product strategy must therefore emphasize accessibility, affordability, and experiential value rather than monetary magnitude.

Social Factors

Social trends represent both the most promising and most demanding dimension for AIRC. Italian Gen Z expresses strong concern for health, mental well-being, and sustainability, yet simultaneously exhibits high institutional skepticism. Their engagement logic is relational rather than transactional: authenticity, inclusivity, and community participation outweigh traditional authority or prestige. They respond to movements, not to institutions. Moreover, social identity formation increasingly occurs in digital spaces, where causes become lifestyle markers and "social trophies." This dynamic offers AIRC a fertile cultural terrain if it can translate its scientific mission into emotionally resonant narratives that empower individual participation.

Technological Factors

Digital technology is the principal enabler of Gen Z engagement. Social platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitch constitute the new agora of attention and social capital. Nonprofits must therefore master short-form storytelling, user-generated content, and influencer collaborations to remain visible. Simultaneously, frictionless payment technologies and gamified engagement tools enable micro-donations and social sharing of contributions. The proliferation of data analytics and CRM solutions further allows hyper-segmentation and personalized donor journeys, aligning with Gen Z's expectation of individualized interaction. Yet, this digital dependence also raises challenges in content authenticity and information overload, requiring AIRC to craft a coherent digital identity consistent with its scientific credibility.

Environmental Factors

While AIRC's core mission focuses on cancer research rather than environmental sustainability, ecological consciousness is central to Gen Z's worldview. Partnerships or campaigns that symbolically link health research to environmental well-being (e.g., the role of pollution in cancer incidence) could enhance relevance. Environmentally responsible operations, carbon-neutral events, and eco-friendly product design for fundraising activities are increasingly expected by this cohort. Failing to embed sustainability principles risks reputational dissonance in a generation highly sensitive to "greenwashing."

Legal Factors

AIRC operates within Italy's nonprofit legal framework (Codice del Terzo Settore 2017), which mandates transparency, ethical fundraising, and privacy compliance (GDPR). The expansion into digitally mediated micro-donations introduces regulatory considerations concerning data protection, payment security, and influencer advertising disclosures. While these frameworks ensure donor trust, they also impose procedural complexity that may slow innovation. An agile legal strategy balancing compliance and digital experimentation is thus essential.

2.2 SWOT Analysis

Building upon the PESTEL insights, the SWOT framework synthesizes AIRC's internal capabilities and external conditions to assess strategic readiness for Gen Z market entry through a new product or engagement platform.

Strengths

1. Scientific Credibility and Institutional Legitimacy:

AIRC is Italy's most established foundation in oncological research funding, commanding public trust and institutional recognition built over six decades. This scientific authority constitutes a strong brand asset and a differentiator from more activist-oriented competitors.

2. National Reach and Operational Infrastructure:

With regional committees across Italy and established fundraising mechanisms, AIRC benefits from extensive logistical capacity to deploy new campaigns and hybrid physical-digital initiatives.

3. Proven Fundraising Expertise:

Historical success in mobilizing large-scale donations demonstrates organizational competence in resource allocation, governance, and stakeholder coordination.

4. Partnership Network:

Long-standing collaborations with research centers, media outlets, and corporate sponsors provide a robust foundation for cross-sector partnerships targeting younger audiences.

Weaknesses

1. Outdated Brand Perception:

Among Gen Z, AIRC's image remains formal, distant, and institutionally heavy. The absence of a distinctive digital voice reduces emotional connection and shareability.

2. Limited Digital Agility:

Legacy reliance on television and print campaigns has delayed the development of advanced social media capabilities, influencer relations, and data-driven marketing.

3. Low Brand Awareness Among Youth:

Despite the relevance of its cause, spontaneous recall among younger Italians remains low compared to peers such as Emergency and Telethon.

4. Hierarchical Organizational Culture:

Decision-making structures optimized for accountability may impede creative experimentation and rapid iteration required for digital engagement strategies.

Opportunities

1. Emerging Giving Behaviors:

The normalization of micro-donations and mobile payments opens avenues for AIRC to introduce low-barrier digital giving integrated into daily routines (e.g., in-app gamified challenges).

2. Cause Relevance and Emotional Resonance:

Cancer's universal touchpoint and association with well-being position AIRC advantageously to connect health science with self-care narratives resonating among Gen Z.

3. Digital Storytelling and Influencer Partnerships:

Collaboration with credible creators and researchers can humanize science, translating complex research into relatable stories with viral potential.

4. Blue Ocean Positioning:

No major Italian nonprofit has yet authentically combined scientific research, personal well-being, and digital gamification. AIRC can occupy this intersection and redefine charitable engagement for youth.

Threats

1. Attention Scarcity and Content Saturation:

In an ecosystem where brands, apps, and social causes compete for seconds of user attention, maintaining sustained engagement is an existential challenge.

2. Institutional Distrust and Skepticism:

Gen Z's critical stance toward traditional institutions implies that any perceived lack of transparency could rapidly erode trust.

3. Competitive Innovation:

Rivals such as Emergency are experimenting with activist storytelling and immersive online campaigns, raising audience expectations for interactivity and authenticity.

4. Economic Uncertainty:

Macroeconomic instability and precarious youth employment may limit conversion from engagement to recurring donation, despite high interest in the cause.

2.3 Strategic Implications

The analyses converge on a key insight: AIRC's challenge is not one of relevance but of resonance. Its scientific legitimacy offers strong foundations, yet it must be reframed through digital storytelling, participatory experiences, and micro-engagement formats that align with Gen Z's values of authenticity, transparency, and community.

A successful marketing plan will therefore depend on AIRC's ability to leverage its institutional trust while adopting the agility, creativity, and emotional vocabulary characteristic of the digital-native generation it seeks to reach.

Part 3: Survey Results

To understand Gen Z's motivations and barriers toward charitable giving, a survey was conducted among 60 respondents aged 18–28, mostly university students (80%), AIRC's ideal Fit & Fund target. Most participants (63.3%) were aged 21–22, representing a digitally native and socially conscious demographic.

Awareness and Cause Alignment

Although AIRC's mission resonates with youth values, awareness remains limited: 38% of respondents were not familiar with the organization, and only 17% were very familiar. Other health charities, such as Telethon (61.7%) and Emergency (38.3%), showed higher visibility. Yet AIRC's field remains highly relevant, Gen Z participants prioritized social justice and equality (66.7%), mental health (65%), and medical research (45%), with 63% personally affected by cancer or knowing someone who was.

Barriers and Motivations

The main barriers to donation were limited personal budget (60%) and uncertainty about how donations are used (50%), underscoring the importance of transparency. Indeed, when asked what would make them choose AIRC over other charities, respondents ranked clear impact reporting first, followed by student discounts and accessibility, and modern, engaging communication.

Engagement and Preferences

Gen Z prefers discovering causes via Instagram and TikTok (43%), followed by peer recommendations and university events. They respond most to simple explanations of research (50%), young researcher stories (48%), and behind-the-scenes lab content (45%), showing that authenticity and storytelling outperform formal institutional messages.

Students also favored pop-up charity shops (55%), educational talks by researchers (48%), and collaborations with student associations (48%). Open-ended suggestions reinforced the demand for

creative events, cancer awareness workshops, and interactive campaigns that bring research closer to student life.

Behavioral Insights

The preferred way to contribute was through one-time purchases (43%), followed by small monthly donations (18%) or buying charity-linked products (17%), confirming that transactional giving best fits Gen Z habits. Mobile payments (60%) were the dominant method, emphasizing convenience. When shopping for charity, supporting a meaningful cause (75%) and good deals (65%) were key motivators, with fashion and accessories as the top product choice.

Overall, Gen Z is open to supporting AIRC when giving feels easy, transparent, and participatory. They want to see their impact, share it socially, and feel part of a community. The Fit & Fund initiative, combining accessible giving, visible research outcomes, and lifestyle-based engagement, directly meets these expectations and positions AIRC as a charity that speaks their language.

Part 4: Product Presentation - The "Fit & Fund" App

Our ambition is not to become another fitness app, but to create a new category: 'Wellness Activism'. We are turning self-investment (self-care) into an investment for society (social-care). AIRC is no longer asking for help; it is offering a tool for personal and collective achievement. By becoming a daily wellness partner, AIRC can create a unique category and become the go-to for young people who want their daily actions to have an extraordinary impact.

4.1. Concept: "Move Your Body. Fund the Cure."

"Fit & Fund" is much more than an app; it's an engagement ecosystem that transforms the most positive and personal energy, physical activity and well-being, into direct, traceable funding for cancer research. The principle is simple and powerful: every calorie burned, every kilometer run, every minute of meditation, every wellness challenge completed can be turned into a tangible, rewarding, and socially valued micro-donation.

Our premise is simple: your sweat has value. Every kilometer, every effort, is currency for research. 'Fit & Fund' is not a charity app. It's an effort bank where you deposit your energy to fund hope. We're not asking for your money, we're asking for your energy.

4.2. Key Features and User Experience

The "Fit & Fund" experience is designed to be immersive, social, visually stimulating, and extremely intuitive, to seamlessly integrate into Gen Z's digital habits.

- **The "Challenge Hub":** This is the beating heart of the app, a constant source of motivation and engagement.
 - **Challenge Packs:** The user buys a "pack" to unlock one or more challenges. This

micro-transaction is the entry point. Examples:

- *Starter Pack (€5)*: Run 5k, do 30 minutes of yoga, or walk 7,000 steps. Ideal for discovering the app.
- *Endurance Pack (€10)*: Run 10k, go for a 2-hour hike, or cycle 50km in a week. For regular users.
- *Wellness Pack (€7)*: 5 days of guided meditation, keep a gratitude journal, or complete 3 stretching sessions. For a holistic approach to well-being.
- *Monthly Challenge Pack (€15)*: A full month-long program with progressive goals.
- **Community Challenges**: Collective challenges are regularly launched to unite the community and create viral moments. E.g., "Goal: Collectively run the distance from Rome to Milan in 48 hours!", or challenges between universities to fund a research grant.
- **Sponsored Challenges**: Partner brands (sports equipment, nutrition, tech) can sponsor challenges. For example, a running brand could launch a "Run 100km in a month" challenge and offer discounts to all finishers, while also matching the donations collected.
- **Gamification and Social Rewards**:
 - **Digital Badges and Trophies**: Each completed challenge unlocks animated, unique, and shareable badges (e.g., "5K Finisher," "Cancer Fighter," "Wellness Warrior"). Some "rare" or limited-edition badges can be unlocked during special events (Pink October, etc.), creating a sense of urgency and collectibility.
 - **Levels and "Impact Score"**: Users progress through levels, unlocking features or customization options. A highly visible "Impact Score" on their public profile reflects their total contribution, becoming a social status indicator within the community. To enhance this, 'Impact Streaks' (similar to Snapchat's 'Snap Streaks') will reward the completion of daily or weekly challenges, creating an engagement habit. Furthermore, AR (Augmented Reality) filters for Instagram/TikTok stories, unlockable with badges, will turn the reward into desirable, viral content.
 - **Leaderboards**: Dynamic, multi-faceted leaderboards (by friend, university, city, team) stimulate friendly competition and long-term engagement.
- **Real-Time Impact**:
 - **Personalized "Impact Dashboard"**: This is the key feature for building trust. Each user has a visual and interactive dashboard showing the direct and concrete impact of their donations. The conversion is simple and memorable: "Your €5 funded 30 minutes of microscope work for Dr. Bianchi's team in Milan," or "Thanks to your challenge, we were able to purchase 10 Petri dishes."
 - **Researcher Stories**: The app integrates short, vertical, and authentic content (in "stories" or TikTok format) featuring the young researchers funded by AIRC. We discover their daily life in the lab, their doubts, their hopes, and their breakthroughs. This puts a face to the cause and creates a strong emotional connection.
- **Social and Technical Integration**:
 - **Seamless Syncing**: The app syncs natively with Apple Health, Google Fit, Strava, and major smartwatches (Garmin, Apple Watch) for automatic, passive, and effortless tracking.
 - **Branded Social Sharing**: At the end of each challenge, the user can generate a visually appealing performance card or a short dynamic video to share on Instagram or TikTok. This

content is pre-formatted with their stats, badge, and the AIRC logo, turning every user into a micro-influencer for the cause.

- **Teams and Groups:** Users can create teams with friends, colleagues, or university classmates to compete against each other or achieve common goals, with an integrated group chat for encouragement.

4.3. The "Fit & Fund" Universe Beyond the App

The app is the center of the ecosystem, but its success will depend on its ability to manifest in the real world to create a true "phygital" (physical + digital) community.

- **"Fit & Fund Live" Events:** Colorful 5k runs, sunrise yoga sessions on rooftops, or bootcamps organized on university campuses. Participation is validated via a QR code in the app, which becomes the access pass to exclusive experiences.
- **"Campus Captains" Ambassador Network:** A structured network of influential student leaders who become the faces and organizers of "Fit & Fund" on their campus. They are not just relays but co-creators who propose local challenges and provide community feedback.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** Authentic collaborations with sports, nutrition, tech, or wellness brands that are genuinely desired by Gen Z. The goal is to offer exclusive and relevant rewards (discounts, limited-edition products, VIP access) to the most engaged users, thereby enhancing the app's perceived value.

Part 5: Consumer Insights & Target Barriers

5.1. Understanding Gen Z: A New Paradigm of Engagement

Gen Z is not simply a younger version of Millennials; they possess a unique set of values, expectations, and behaviors shaped by a native digital upbringing, a keen social consciousness in the face of global crises (climate, economic), and pervasive uncertainty. For "Fit & Fund" to succeed, a deep understanding of their psyche is imperative.

Strategic Principle : From the Institution to the Individual.

This guiding principle turns the simple observation of the need for authenticity into a clear directive for all communication: every message, every piece of content must be embodied by a person (a researcher, an ambassador, a user), not the AIRC logo. Gen Z has a deep, almost allergic aversion to traditional corporate marketing and polished institutional communications. They seek authentic, unfiltered, and human interactions. Trust is given to content creators, passionate experts, and peers, not logos. For AIRC, this means abandoning a posture of distant scientific authority to adopt a transparent, human, and even vulnerable voice. Showing the failures, the doubts, and the long process of research will be more powerful than a simple press release about a discovery.

Key Finding 2: Impact Must Be Visual, Instant, and Personal.

The concept of a donation getting lost in a large, anonymous "pot" is a major deterrent, seen as a black hole. Gen Z, accustomed to the instant gratification of the digital world, needs to see the cause-and-effect link immediately. The success of platforms like GoFundMe is based on this principle: you give to a

person, for a specific need. "Fit & Fund" must translate every euro into a tangible, visual, and understandable result. The "Impact Dashboard" feature is therefore not just a "feature," but the core of the value proposition and the primary tool for building trust.

Key Finding 3: Community is the Engine of Action.

Whether it's social movements on social media or viral trends on TikTok, Gen Z's actions are almost always catalyzed by the group. Engagement is a social experience, a way to connect and define one's identity. A purely utilitarian and solitary application has very little chance of holding their attention. "Fit & Fund" must be designed from the outset as a niche social network, integrating powerful mechanisms: team challenges, leaderboards among friends, easy sharing, and mutual encouragement. The app must become the digital "clubhouse" for a community that shares the same values.

Key Finding 4: The Fusion of Well-being and Activism.

Gen Z is the "self-care" generation, highly attentive to its mental and physical health. But it is also very conscious of global issues and often feels a form of eco-anxiety or helplessness. They see no contradiction between self-improvement and world-improvement; on the contrary, they actively seek ways to align the two. "Fit & Fund" fits perfectly into this trend. The app offers an action that is simultaneously beneficial for the individual (health, stress reduction, sense of accomplishment) and for the collective (funding research). It is a concrete solution to their desire to act, a positive outlet for their anxieties.

5.2. Barriers to Adoption and Proposed Solutions

- **Barrier 1: Budget Constraints ("I can't afford it").**
 - **Insight:** This is the most cited and most concrete barrier. Students and young professionals have limited income and many competing demands.
 - **"Fit & Fund" Solution:** The **micro-transaction** model (€5-10) significantly lowers the entry barrier. Buying a "challenge pack" is perceived less as a donation and more as a small purchase for leisure or a service, similar to a coffee, a VOD, or an app subscription. Additionally, a **freemium** model could allow users to participate in community challenges for free to experience the app, with monetization coming from personal challenges and advanced features.
 -
- **Barrier 2: Skepticism and Lack of Trust ("Where is my money really going?").**
 - **Insight:** A general distrust of large organizations. Gen Z fears their donation will be absorbed by opaque operating costs.
 - **"Fit & Fund" Solution: Radical transparency** is our main weapon. The Impact Dashboard showing concrete equivalencies is the first pillar. The second is storytelling centered on researchers, which puts a human face on the impact. The third pillar is to openly communicate our costs, simply explaining how every euro is allocated. This radical honesty is the only way to build lasting trust.
- **Barrier 3: "Charity Fatigue" and Information Overload ("I'm already asked too much").**
 - **Insight:** Gen Z is constantly bombarded with calls to action for multiple causes, which can lead

to decision paralysis and inaction.

- **"Fit & Fund" Solution:** We fundamentally reframe the ask. The approach is user-centric, focusing on their fitness and wellness goals. The first call to action is not "Donate," but "Take the challenge." The social impact is the **positive and integrated consequence** of an action they would take for themselves anyway. It's a value proposition that adds to their lives, not a request that subtracts resources from it.

- **Barrier 4: Lack of Personal Connection to the Cause ("Cancer feels distant to me").**
 - **Insight:** For many young people who have not been directly affected by the disease in their close circle, the cause can seem abstract, distant, and intimidating.
 - **"Fit & Fund" Solution:** The app makes the cause accessible and engagement easy and fun. By focusing on a positive and universal action (sports), we create a non-intimidating entry point. Moreover, we will integrate a feature allowing users to **dedicate their efforts** (a run, a challenge) to a loved one. To take this further, this feature could generate a temporary, personal 'campaign' page for that person. The user could invite their friends to join their challenge 'for Marco,' and the team's cumulative impact would be visible on that page. This transforms a personal tribute into a community-driven micro-fundraising event, amplifying engagement and emotional reach.

Part 6: Strategic Approach

AIRC's Gen Z engagement strategy balances growth ambitions with resource limits, prioritizing rapid market entry via low-barrier initiatives and building sustainable operations. Survey data highlights limited budgets, low AIRC recognition, and doubts about donation impact as main barriers. The strategy includes a short-term pilot phase, long-term national expansion, and a clear positioning to differentiate AIRC in Italy's nonprofit sector.

6.1 Short-Term Strategy (Months 1–6)

Rapid market introduction and proof-of-concept validation are given top priority during the short-term phase. According to survey data from 60 Gen Z respondents, the majority of them have a limited personal budget, they are unsure of the impact of their donations, and they are unfamiliar with AIRC. Through low-barrier, high-visibility efforts, the first strategy directly targets these limitations.

- Digital Launch (Months 1-2): AIRC creates a Gen Z-focused presence on TikTok and Instagram, which survey participants said were the main avenues for discovery. With five to seven young researchers supported by the AIRC presenting real-life laboratory experiences via short-form video, the Researcher Reality series debuts right away. 84% of Gen Z supports charity causes, according to research, but 70% of them need to see the impact clearly in order to be more involved.
- Campus Captain Recruitment (Months 2-3): AIRC offers €300 monthly stipends along with professional development to five Campus Captains at pilot

institutions (Milano, Roma, Bologna, Torino, and Napoli). Effective campus ambassador programs show that student representatives who put in five hours a week successfully encourage interaction among peers. Social interaction, an entrepreneurial spirit, and genuine mission alignment are given top priority during the selection process.

- Pop-Up Shop Pilots (Months 3–4): In direct response to survey results showing that pop-up events were the most popular university presence, three pilot charity stores are opening at universities. According to benchmark data, Temple University raised \$4,600 for three events, whereas campus stores run by the British Heart Foundation made £2,894.95 for each event. Conservative AIRC's goals are 300–500 attendees and €1,000–1,500 for a two-day event. Inventory curation is driven by the top three product categories according to the survey: fashion & accessories, tech products, and beauty products.
- Fit & Fund Beta Development (Months 1-6): Essential app features like challenge purchasing and monitoring, connectivity with fitness platforms (Apple Health, Google Fit, Strava), basic gamification (badges, progress tracking), and an effect dashboard are the focus of parallel development. According to research, gamification can increase engagement by 34–48%, with social aspects and goal-setting being the most successful (78%) and 78%, respectively. With 100–150 users, beta testing aims for 40%+ day-one retention, surpassing the industry standard of 30–35%.

6.2 Long-Term Strategy (Year 1-3)

More than 20 universities join the network, and frequent pop-up events are becoming commonplace. With improved gamification, social features, and clear effect information, Fit & Fund completely debuts. Viral and influencer marketing are used to target 5,000 downloads in the first year and over 30,000 by the third. Universities, corporate wellness collaborations, sponsors, and grants all contribute to revenue diversification. Impact-focused narrative, marquee national events, alumni networks, and gamified advancement are all used in community retention.

6.3 Positioning Statement

AIRC aims to become the premier youth health research philanthropy in Italy by combining accessible giving, transparency, and wellness. The Fit & Fund app appeals to Gen Z's activity patterns and mental health priorities by tying self-care and research support together. AIRC stands apart from other Italian NGOs thanks to its €143 million financial legacy and innovative approach to Gen Z's digital habits.

Part 7: Strategy for Online Communication

AIRC's traditional communication approach and limited social media presence fail to reach Gen Z where they live digitally. Therefore, they need to provide seamless integration across digital and physical

touchpoints to create a cohesive brand experience.

7.1 Digital communication

- This is the primary communication focus, connecting with Gen z on social media platforms like Tiktok and Instagram to share authentic stories with shorter videos, capturing gen z's attention. By featuring young AIRC researchers sharing their experiences in the lab, it highlights the direct link between donations and research progress.
- User generated challenges will encourage users to record and share their progress, turning social effort into social proof through hashtags such as #RunForResearch
- Collaborating with popular fitness and wellness micro-influencers that Gen z actually follow will increase reach and will act as credible intermediaries. Even collaborating with students at universities provides a bottom-up approach, where they can post how the app impacts their daily lives. Recognising that Gen Z uses social media for self-expression and community validation enables users to co-create and share content, AIRC meets these intrinsic motivations while amplifying visibility.

7.2 Offline communication

- Campus captains programme where student ambassadors will lead fitness challenges while also representing AIRC at universities, by holding free workout or yoga classes run by volunteers and students.
- Local collaborations with sports centres and wellness clubs will also provide legitimacy and visibility
- To integrate online and offline approaches seamlessly, these events will have digital tools like QR codes and in-app check ins as well as live leader boards that will encourage participation. This user generated content builds credibility through advocacy
- Consistent visual identity (logos, colour palettes, tone) will strengthen recognition

The campaign's central message, "Move Your Body, Fund the Cure", shows the dual focus on personal wellness as well as collective impact. This message will remain consistent across all communication platforms, ensuring coherence and recognisability. The tone of voice will be authentic and empowering, aligning with research that shows Gen Z responds positively to brands that demonstrate transparency and vulnerability. The communication will shift focus from the institution to the individual, presenting the AIRC mission through relatable real life stories of young researchers, student ambassadors, and everyday users.

Effectiveness will be evaluated through a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators, ensuring continuous improvement and allowing them to adjust messaging and targeting dynamically.

- Engagement Metrics: Likes, shares, comments, and participation in digital challenges.
- Conversion Metrics: App downloads, challenge completions, and micro-donation frequency.
- Brand Metrics: Surveys tracking trust, awareness, and perceived transparency among Gen Z.

- Community Metrics: Number of Campus Captains, university partnerships, and event participation.

Part 8: Plan for Budget and Resources

The current e-shop activities of AIRC, which generate over €1 million annually with operating costs (goods, logistics, and marketing) of roughly €500,000 (capex excluded), serve as a clear source of inspiration for the budgeting for this Gen Z project. The new venture should, in accordance with internal recommendations, strive for operational expenses of little more than €50,000 year (excluding one-time capital expenses), particularly if the product or service will be sold for more than a few years.

8.1 Budget for Operation

- Annual Goal: Operating expenses should not exceed €50,000 annually.
 - Covers: marketing and advertising, inventory management, pop-up store logistics, staff/ambassador stipends, and minor event or app maintenance expenses.
 - This amount of money represents a lean model suitable for a pilot or early-stage innovation, as it is one-tenth of the current e-shop's cost base.
- CapEx (Capital Expenditure): If the selected product or service is intended to be sustainable and available for more than two years, then additional one-time expenditure may be taken into consideration. Capex could include long-lasting equipment for longer-term pop-up shop infrastructure or significant technological developments (such as app development).

8.2 Spending Structure Example:

Staff & Ambassadors: ~€15,000/year (includes stipends for Campus Captains, minimal central coordination)

Marketing & Communications: ~€10,000/year (targeted social ads, university materials, content production, basic influencer fees)

Pop-Up Shop & Events: ~€12,000/year (event permits, basic equipment, transport and logistics, pop-up branding)

App Maintenance/Minor Updates: ~€8,000/year (routine technical support, impact dashboard, content updates)

Miscellaneous/Contingency: ~€5,000/year (unexpected costs, minor pilots, improvements)

CapEx (if multi-year commitment): Separate, e.g., €30,000-60,000 one-time for full-feature app development or branded event equipment.

Sourcing: Funding should come from a combination of business partners, program-generated income (such as pop-up sales and app challenge micro-fees), and current AIRC running resources (perhaps reallocated from e-shop excess). Organisational fit and financial realism are guaranteed by benchmarking

to the online store.

Budget Philosophy: The goal is to preserve budgetary restraint while optimising Gen Z involvement and growth potential. The AIRC guarantees pilot feasibility, scalability, and the flexibility to assess or adjust the program annually without being locked into high fixed costs by limiting annual running expenses at €50,000 and only authorising bigger capital outlays for sustained, multi-year initiatives. This strategy preserves AIRC's overall financial viability while fostering innovation.

Part 9: Managing Risk

Although Gen Z participation has a lot of promise, success depends on foreseeing problems and formulating precise solutions. Every quarter, the probability, impact, monitoring indicators, and response plans of each of the six risk categories—development, adoption, operations, financial, reputational, and external—are assessed.

- Technical and Development Risks
 - App Delays: Make use of time buffers, beta testing, phased milestones, and seasoned vendors.
 - Technical Issues: Use rigorous testing, feedback loops, and committed assistance.
 - Integration Failures: Secure platform relationships, keep backup manual entry.

- Adoption and Engagement Risks
 - Low Uptake: Verify with influencers, campus captains, pilots.
 - Poor Retention: Use community elements, gamification, recognition, and new content.
 - Captain Attrition: Clearly define responsibilities, provide training, incentives, and succession planning.

- Operational risks
 - Event logistics include trial runs, comprehensive manuals, training, and backup supplies.
 - Inventory problems include seasonal planning, vendor backups, and quality inspections.
 - Volunteer Shortages: Continue to provide recognition, regular training, and a recruitment pipeline.

- Financial risks
 - Revenue Shortfalls: Diversify your sources of income, set reasonable goals, and keep emergency reserves on hand.
 - Cost overruns can be prevented by using a 10% budget cushion, monthly reviews, large expenditure approvals, and fixed vendor contracts.

- Reputational risks
 - Mission Drift: Use transparent reporting, elevate researcher voices, and keep communication linked to the impact of the study.
 - Privacy concerns include opt-in procedures, secure infrastructure, minimum data acquisition, and enforcing GDPR compliance.
 - Bad Experiences: Make sure there is quality control, prompt problem solving, and proactive reputation management.

- External risks
 - Competition: Prioritise innovation, co-creation, authenticity, and AIRC reputation.
 - Economic Downturn: Make use of flexible volunteering, micro-donations, and reasonably priced involvement opportunities.
 - Use the digital-first strategy, virtual and outdoor activities, and a community support focus when dealing with health crises.

Part 10: Long-Term Sustainability

10.1 Long-Term Sustainability

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of Fit & Fund requires a multidimensional approach. For AIRC, this means embedding Fit & Fund into its broader operational ecosystem as a self-sustaining initiative that continues to engage Gen Z donors while remaining consistent with the foundation's mission of supporting cancer research. Sustainability is achieved by transforming transactional giving into habitual engagement and diversifying revenue streams beyond direct donations. As Gen Z matures into higher earning potential, early engagement through Fit & Fund lays the groundwork for lifelong philanthropic relationships

10.2 Financial and operational sustainability

The micro-donation system within the app ensures a continuous flow of small contributions from users and, therefore, reduces the dependency on large, infrequent fundraising events.

The model of the app makes these donations become habit-forming and feel less like a charitable task and more like a small purchase for a service or leisure activity, generating recurring revenue and brand loyalty. According to the social network effect (Saxton and Wang, 2014) peer pressure is generated because prospective donors can see when family and friends publicly support a cause, making them more inclined to contribute. The "Fit & Fund" app's core features such as leader boards, team challenges, and social sharing, are direct mechanisms to apply this social pressure, fostering long-term, community-driven fundraising. Moreover, the gamification features, such as Impact Streaks, are designed to reward the completion of daily or weekly challenges, explicitly creating an engagement habit that encourages sustained participation and associated micro-donations.

The initiative's annual operational expenses should be constrained to a low budget, such as the suggested maximum of €50,000 per year. This lean model guarantees feasibility and scalability, ensuring that AIRC is not tied into high fixed costs. Capital expenditures should only be authorised for multi-year initiatives, confirming the long-term utility of the app and related digital infrastructure.

10.3 Revenue diversification and partnerships

It is important to diversify revenue streams by building sponsorships through partner brands that are known and used by gen z. They can sponsor challenges within the app, potentially matching the donations collected or offering exclusive rewards to engaged users, and enhancing the app's perceived value and providing a non-donation income stream.

10.4 Transparency, Trust, and Brand Credibility

The long-term strategy must prioritise maintaining credibility and ensuring that promotional efforts are backed by genuine actions, to avoid "greenwashing" and misleading claims that can reduce consumer trust and harm brand reputation, especially as gen z appreciate the transparency on where their money is really going. This is why the Impact Dashboard feature is central to long-term sustainability, through visually displaying real-time donation usage, scientific progress, and measurable outcomes. Sustainability relies on maintaining an authentic voice so The Researcher Reality TikTok Series must be an ongoing effort to share the work and life of young AIRC researchers using short-form, authentic content. This humanises the cause, and builds a powerful emotional connection. As Fit and Fund relies on a loyal community rather than just one-time donors, it is crucial to build this trust to ensure long term sustainability.

10.5 Ethical, Social, and Environmental Sustainability

Fit & Fund advances the Sustainable Development Goals by integrating personal wellness with collective action. By transforming health-conscious behaviours into research funding, AIRC aligns itself with sustainable social innovation principles. The dual focus on self-care and community impact ensures that participation remains intrinsically rewarding, enhancing long-term retention and advocacy. A proactive digital strategy should also include sustainability reporting and carbon-conscious hosting solutions, reinforcing AIRC's environmental responsibility and appealing to Gen Z's ethical expectations.

Bibliography

Blackbaud Institute. (2023). *The next generation of giving: Understanding and engaging Gen Z and Millennial donors*. Blackbaud Institute.

McKinsey & Company. (2023). *What is Gen Z?* McKinsey & Company.

Salesforce Research. (2022). *Connected audience report: Focus on Generation Z*. Salesforce.

Vita Non Profit e Italics Research. (2023). *Giving Italy 2023: La filantropia nel nostro Paese*.

Fondazione AIRC per la Ricerca sul Cancro. (2024). *Bilancio sociale 2024*.

Saxton, G. D., & Wang, L. (2014). The social network effect: The determinants of giving through social media. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 43(5), 850–868.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764013485159>