The foundation's second ledger

A best-practice guide from ImaginAItion Academies. Every foundation keeps a ledger of gifts. The ones that last keep a second ledger, of relationships.

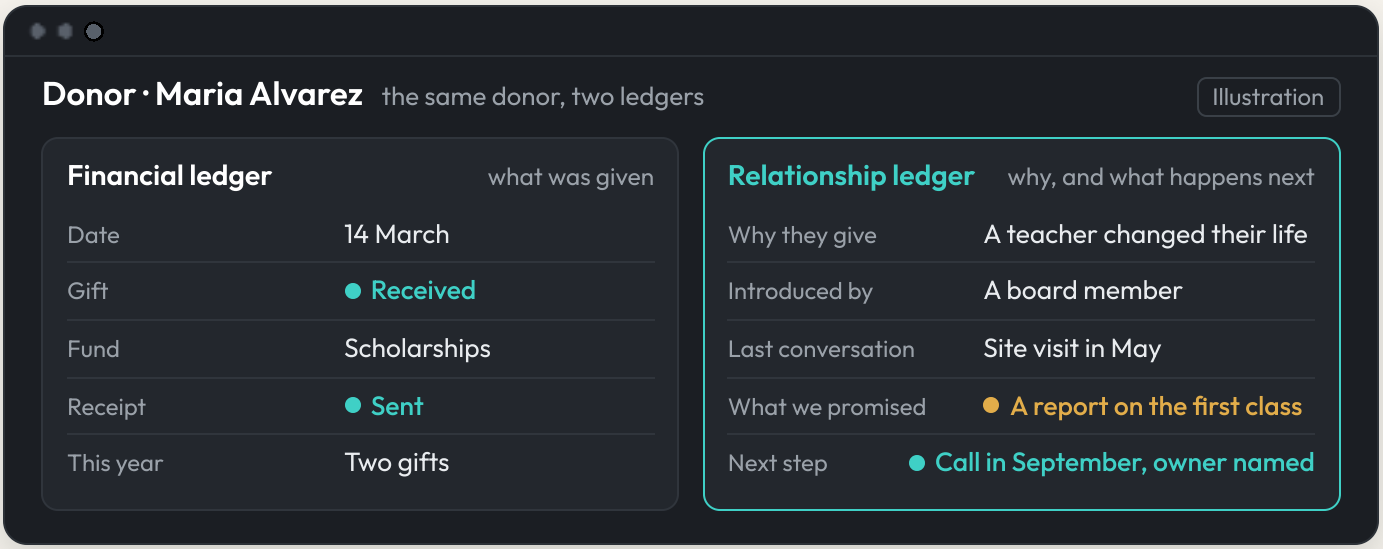


Illustration. The same donor, seen two ways.

What only the second ledger can answer

The financial ledger knows		The relationship ledger knows
How much came in	→	**Who is likely to give again, and why**
Who gave last year	→	**Who has gone quiet since**
The size of the largest gift	→	**Who could make the next one, and who knows them**
That a receipt was sent	→	**Whether the promise behind the gift was kept**

The second ledger is the asset

It outlasts staff

When a director leaves, the relationships stay with the foundation.

It is written weekly

Every real conversation gets one line, the same day.

It always has a next step

No donor record without an owner and a date.

From first gift to legacy

A donor's giving follows an arc. Each step up is earned by one kind of contact, done on time.

Donors by stage

first gift to legacy

Illustration

Stage	Donors		The contact that moves them on
First gift		120	Thank within 48 hours
Second gift		46	Show what the first gift did
Regular giving		30	A person, not a mailing
Major gift		8	Ask in person, for one thing
Legacy		2	Honor their story
Lapsed		38	No gift in twelve months. Ask why before asking again.

Six numbers for the board

Donor retention

Donors who gave again this year ÷ donors who gave last year.

Second-gift rate

First-time donors who give a second time within twelve months.

Gift frequency

Gifts per donor per year. Monthly givers are counted apart.

Lapsed and won back

Donors gone twelve months, and how many returned after a call.

Stewardship kept

Promised reports, visits and thank-yous delivered on time ÷ promised.

Major-gift pipeline

Named prospects by stage, each with an owner and a next step.

A stewardship rhythm you can keep

48 hours

A personal thank-you for every gift.

90 days

One story of what the gift did.

Twice a year

A real conversation, with no ask in it.

Once a year

The ask, specific and in person where it matters.

A common rhythm, offered as a starting point. Set your own and measure whether you keep it.

> **About this guide:** it is best practice only. ImaginAItion does not offer a donor management product today. If your foundation wants one built around its second ledger, that is the conversation to start.

Start with an AI Assessment

We look at where your donor knowledge lives now and what a second ledger would take.

studios.imaginaitioninc.com/ai-assessment