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StarChart™: 2026 Research Pre-Award and Compliance Platforms

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Tambellini StarChart: 2026 Research Pre-Award and Compliance Platforms

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INTRODUCTION AND REPORT SUMMARY

The Tambellini Group, the leading analyst and advisory firm focused on higher education, is pleased to present the *Tambellini StarChart™: Pre-Award and Compliance*. As institutions navigate unprecedented change associated with societal forces and economic factors, a StarChart™ is designed to help higher education institutions visually navigate their current technology landscape through the lens of usability and innovation—which Tambellini research shows are the two biggest drivers of how institutions make technology investments.

StarCharts are part of Tambellini's multifaceted approach to helping institutions achieve their best technological state while also leveraging Tambellini's Future Campus™ Framework. Tambellini's Future Campus Framework complements the StarCharts, providing additional clarity on an institution's needs and requirements and ultimately helping to inform and guide modernization initiatives. The Future Campus is Tambellini's vision of where innovation and cutting-edge technology converge to create a sustainable, leading higher education institution.

This groundbreaking approach builds on more than 20 years of higher education research and proven success, providing relevant and timely contextualized information. Tambellini's proprietary methodology leverages input from hundreds of higher education institutions, Tambellini analysts and strategic advisors, vendors, implementation partners, and more.

To include a pre-award and compliance solution in the 2026 StarChart, Tambellini analysts evaluated solutions based on a specific set of criteria. Tambellini included research pre-award and compliance solutions that support proposal development, budget preparation, sponsor and funding-opportunity tracking, electronic routing and approval, and research compliance management, are currently being sold in the United States higher education market and are currently in use by at least one higher education institution.

Tambellini StarChart™: Pre-Award and Compliance shows how solutions scored against a matrix of usability and innovation criteria. The scoring is developed to help guide institutions in their journey to identify the best-fit solution to suit their needs.

It is important to note that placement on the StarChart does not necessarily mean a solution is the best fit for every institution. In fact, the underlying innovation in the approach proves that depending on the orientation of the institution, the same solution can appear stronger to one institution than another.

Higher education institutions increasingly need integrated research administration platforms that span the full sponsored-research lifecycle, from proposal development and budget preparation through sponsor and funding-opportunity tracking, electronic routing and approval, and ongoing compliance management. As research portfolios grow in scale and complexity, institutions require solutions that unify pre-award and compliance activities—including IRB, IACUC, and conflict-of-interest oversight—to reduce administrative burden, strengthen regulatory compliance, and support research growth across central and departmental offices.

The Pre-Award and Compliance Vendors Evaluated

- Cayuse*
- Huron
- Info Ed*
- Key Solutions*
- Kuali
- Novelution
- Polus Solutions*
- Streamlyne

* Cayuse, Info Ed, Polus, and Key Solutions opted not to fully participate in the vendor survey request for information, which may negatively impact their StarChart placement.

KEY ACRONYMS IN THIS GUIDE:

IACUC – Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee

IRB – Institutional Review Board

COI – Conflict of Interest

R1 – Carnegie Research 1: Very High Research Spending and Doctorate Production

R2 – Carnegie Research 2: High Research Spending and Doctorate Production

FUTURE CAMPUS IMPACTS

The Future Campus™ Framework is Tambellini's innovative tool for generating strategic-level conversations and action for appropriate investments and divestments across the four key pillars of people, process, data, and technology. The Framework is scored across ten key higher education workspaces.

Pre-award and compliance solutions, which should drive research management across the institutions, can affect the following Future Campus workspaces:

Operations

Research Pre-Award and Compliance Platform products strengthen institutional operations by streamlining the coordination of proposal, award, and compliance activities across central and departmental offices. These platforms help institutions increase efficiency, improve the accuracy and consistency of research data, and support more informed decision-making across the research administration lifecycle.

Revenue

Research Pre-Award and Compliance Platform products can protect and grow revenue by improving how institutions identify and pursue funding opportunities. These platforms help institutions surface relevant funding opportunities, submit stronger and more compliant proposals, and increase the likelihood of being awarded research funding.

Risk

Research Pre-Award and Compliance Platform solutions platforms help institutions stay ahead of evolving compliance obligations, maintain clear and organized records of approvals and disclosures, and reduce the administrative and reputational risks associated with non-compliant research activity.

NAVIGATING THE TAMBELLINI STARCHART

On the right side of the StarChart™, institutions should expect to see the most complete and usable research pre-award and compliance solutions that have been proven to support institutions of all types and sizes. However, as you might expect, usability comes at a cost, possibly making these solutions cost-prohibitive for some institutions. The research pre-award and compliance solutions positioned on the left side of the StarChart support less functionality that is typically needed by large and complex institutions, and they have not demonstrated scalability in these larger segments. However, solutions on the left side are more affordable and have been proven to support the needs of small- to mid-market institutions, depending on their requirements.

Usability is evaluated based on the following factors:

- Vendor usability evaluation (customer support, software release cadence, implementation, training)
- Functional solution breadth
- US higher education market presence (demonstrated scalability in the market)
- Presence of 2026 market usability differentiators (proven in the market, single platform, and coverage of compliance frameworks).

At the top of the Tambellini StarChart, institutions should expect to see products that both demonstrate innovation and possess the capacity for sustained and future innovation. The products on the bottom of the Tambellini StarChart generally have less embedded innovative features and may not have the ability to innovate and sustain that innovation at scale.

Innovation is evaluated based on the following general factors to be further detailed within the product-specific StarCharts:

- Vendor capacity for future and sustained innovation
- Innovative functionality within core features
- Presence of 2026 market innovation differentiators (AI-powered grant risk analysis, predictive analytics for proposal success, agentic AI functionality, and compliance monitoring).

Tambellini StarChart Orbits further segment vendor solutions into three categories on the StarChart. The **Commander** category is the outermost orbit located in the top right corner of the StarChart. Institutions should anticipate that solutions in the **Commander** Orbit are market leaders with highly innovative and user-centric designs that set the benchmark for what is possible. The **Navigator** category is located in the middle orbit. Solutions in this orbit demonstrate a balance of innovation and usability with more comprehensive and adaptable capabilities beyond niche specialization. The **Specialist** category is the innermost orbit. Solutions in this orbit represent niche offerings that are more narrowly focused on specific

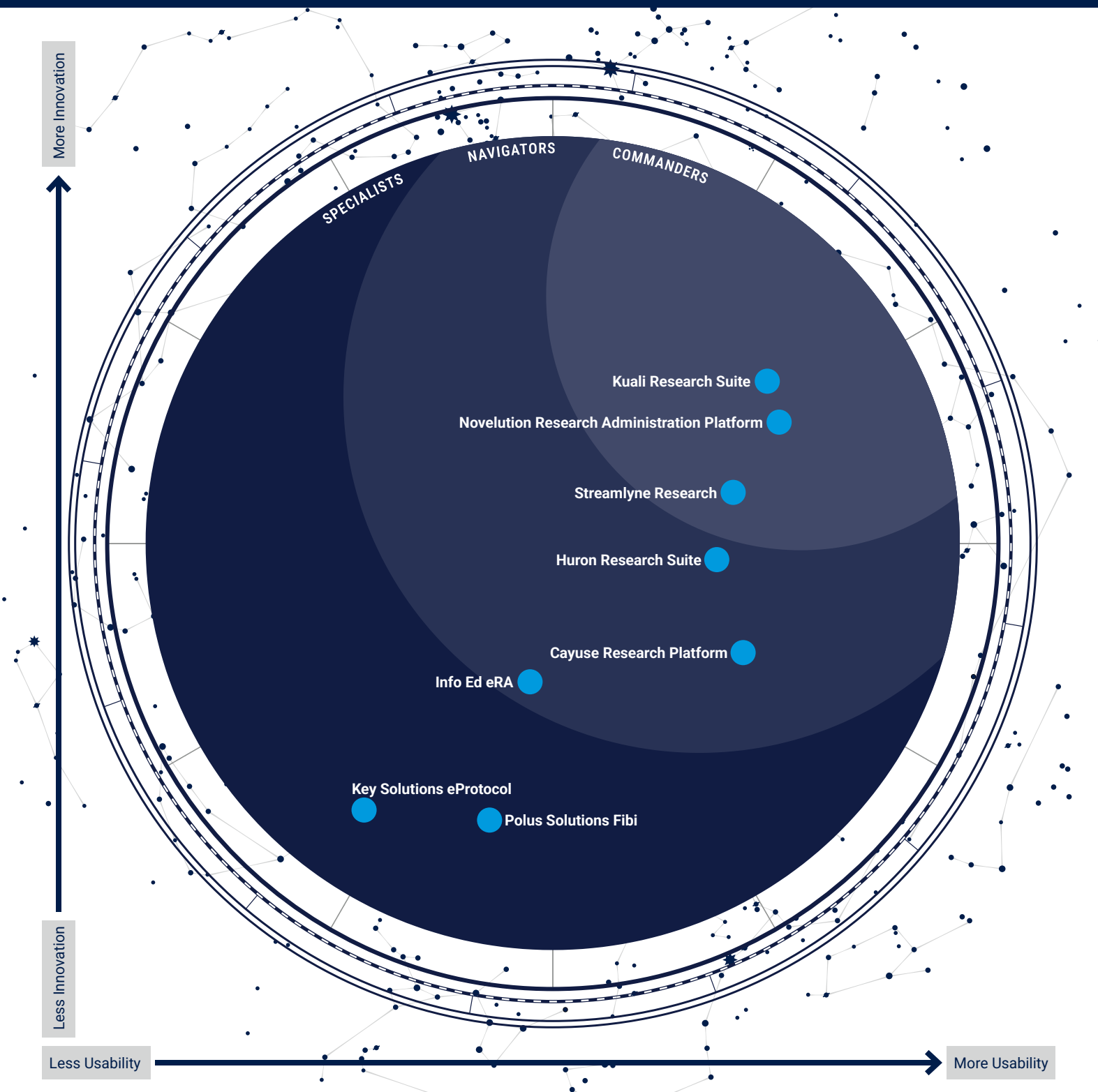
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technology and functional needs, providing high-value to its clients and meeting focused market demands.

An important consideration is that no position on the StarChart is either “good” or “bad” for all institutions. Those institutions with more complex needs and resources are likely to focus on one area of the StarChart, while other institutions with fewer resources and complexity may opt to focus on another area. The StarChart is not aimed at being the sole resource to make a final decision, but rather it provides a point of navigation to help make sense of the market, and down-select to a more manageable number of products to take that next step.

For a more nuanced understanding of the chart and the particular vendor solutions, please contact us to arrange a meeting with a Tambellini Analyst.

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KEY: ● Research Pre-Award and Compliance Platforms

Usability measures the degree of ease in using a system and the degree of breadth in suitability for users to accomplish objectives.

Innovation measures the degree of addressing unique challenges and requirements with novel and/or advanced capabilities.

Forming Systems are in development but not generally available. Their positions are a projection.

RESEARCH PRE-AWARD AND COMPLIANCE PLATFORMS EVALUATION INSIGHTS

- **Cayuse Research Platform** is a maturing cloud platform for higher-education research administration platform covering the full lifecycle from pre-award through compliance. Its legacy version is widely adopted across universities, research institutions, and academic medical centers of all sizes, spanning proposal development, budgeting, award management, and compliance modules (COI, IRB/IACUC, human- and animal-subjects research). The new version is delivered as a cloud-native service that unifies proposal, award, and compliance data.

Cayuse differentiates on workflow usability, broad role-based adoption, and a mature market position, with deep research-administration breadth, system-to-system federal submission, and ERP and identity integrations. Some institutions note a learning curve and a still-maturing cloud version across the suite.

As Cayuse completes its new platform, it is focused on research institutions and academic medical centers seeking a unified, purpose-built platform, especially those consolidating fragmented systems and prioritizing federal submission and ERP/identity integration. Adopting the full suite may require module-level integration support.

- **Huron Research Suite** is a maturing cloud platform research administration suite for universities and academic medical centers, managing grants, agreements, and compliance across the full sponsored-research lifecycle. Its legacy version is strongly adopted among research universities of all sizes; it covers proposal and grants management, agreements, and compliance modules (IRB, IACUC, conflict-of-interest, research safety). The new version is highly configurable, with role-based workflows on a cloud platform spanning central and departmental offices.

Huron differentiates on deep compliance breadth, highly configurable workflows, strong research-intensive adoption, and advisory-backed implementation, with end-to-end lifecycle coverage and ERP and identity integrations. Its breadth and configurability can lengthen implementation timelines.

The maturing version of Huron Research Suite is built for research-intensive universities and academic medical centers that need comprehensive grants, agreements, and compliance on a single platform, particularly for complex operations that require end-to-end coverage across central and departmental offices. Institutions should plan for longer implementation timelines and resource governance accordingly.

- **Info Ed eRA** is an electronic research administration platform managing the full sponsored-research lifecycle, from proposal development through award management and compliance. With moderate market presence among public research universities and academic medical centers of all sizes, it covers proposal submission, grants and award management, and compliance modules (IRB, IACUC, COI, research safety) with configurable workflows and reporting, centralizing data across central and departmental offices.

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Info Ed eRA differentiates on broad lifecycle coverage, deep configurability, and a long-standing presence in research-intensive institutions, with modular, end-to-end functionality and ERP, HR, and identity integrations. Its breadth can require significant configuration and implementation effort.

The platform suits research universities and academic medical centers seeking a modular, end-to-end platform and an established, configurable system of record across central and departmental offices with ERP, HR, and identity integrations. Institutions should scope configuration and implementation effort to internal resources.

- **Key Solutions eProtocol** is a research administration platform supporting the sponsored-research lifecycle across proposal development, grants management, and compliance. With a limited but growing higher-education presence focused on public research universities, it covers proposal routing, grants and award management, conflict-of-interest, protocol and compliance tracking, and analytics—emphasizing a single, configurable system of record across central and departmental offices.

Key Solutions differentiates on configurable workflows, broad coverage, and growing adoption among research universities, with modular pre-award and compliance functionality and ERP, HR, and identity integrations. Its higher-education footprint remains smaller than market leaders.

Key Solutions appeals to public and research universities wanting a flexible, configurable platform with room to scale, and comfortable adopting a still-growing solution with ERP, HR, and identity integrations. Institutions should weigh the vendor's reference base and implementation track record against larger market leaders.

- **Kuali Research Suite** is an innovative research administration suite managing the full sponsored-research lifecycle—proposals, awards, and compliance—on one cloud platform. A dominant market leader with strong adoption across public universities and private not-for-profit research institutions, it covers proposal submission, grants, award, subaward, and budget management, and compliance modules (IRB, IACUC, conflict-of-interest, research safety), now operating as a fully modern SaaS environment.

Kuali differentiates on market maturity on a dynamic platform with deep higher-education focus, and broad pre-award and compliance coverage, with ERP, HR, and identity integrations and a configurable, modular architecture. Full deployments can require meaningful implementation effort.

Kuali serves research-intensive institutions of all sizes wanting a comprehensive, purpose-built platform and valuing market maturity, deep higher-education focus, and a configurable, modern AI-enabled platform with ERP, HR, and identity integrations. Institutions should resource the configuration, governance, and change management that full deployments require.

- **Novelution Research Administration Platform** is an innovative cloud research administration platform aimed at small and mid-sized colleges, universities, and research institutions. Primarily serving private not-for-profit colleges and research centers, it covers proposal

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submission, grants and award management, conflict-of-interest, IRB/IACUC protocol management, animal care operations, and reporting through a configurable, modular interface guiding users across pre-award and compliance.

Novelution differentiates on category-leading workflow usability, configurability, and implementation support tailored to smaller research operations, with an integrated, end-to-end suite and ERP, HR, and identity connections; its innovation profile is now among the strongest of the evaluated solutions, having risen sharply in 2026. Its footprint is concentrated among small and mid-sized institutions.

Novelution works best for institutions seeking a unified pre-award and compliance platform with structured process control, without large-enterprise overhead. Institutions expecting significant research growth should confirm the platform's footprint and roadmap match their trajectory.

- **Polus Solutions Fibi** is a cloud research administration platform unifying proposal development, award management, and compliance. With limited market presence among medium-enrollment private not-for-profit and public institutions, it covers proposal routing, grants, award, and subaward management, conflict-of-interest, IRB/IACUC protocol management, analytics, and workflow automation—positioned to replace disconnected spreadsheets with structured, end-to-end processes.

Polus differentiates on transparent data handling, broad functional coverage relative to its size, integrating with common administrative systems and adding technical integrations for analytics across pre-award and compliance. Its innovation, however, is its weakest dimension and ranks among the lowest of the evaluated solutions.

Polus is a natural fit for institutions replacing spreadsheets and siloed systems with structured, end-to-end administration, valuing research-office control with credible functional range. Institutions should weigh its limited market presence against its breadth, validating references and roadmap stability before committing.

- **Streamlyne Research** is a research administration platform for universities and academic medical centers, bringing proposal development, award management, and compliance into one environment. Strongly adopted across medium-to-large public and private not-for-profit institutions, it covers proposal submission, grants, award, subaward, and budget management, conflict-of-interest, IRB/IACUC protocol management, and general-ledger, HR, and identity integrations—a cloud suite for institutions wanting timely data, structured workflows, and transparent compliance.

Streamlyne differentiates on full research administration depth, strong implementation support, broad pre-integration coverage, and a mature market position, building on a higher-education community-source heritage with ERP, HR, and research-system integration.

Streamlyne is geared toward institutions and academic medical centers seeking a higher-education-focused suite with depth, broad pre-integration coverage, and strong implementation support across pre-award, award, and compliance. Institutions should confirm the configuration, and support model matches the internal resources needed to operate it.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

Looking ahead, research pre-award and compliance platforms will be shaped by the continued push toward end-to-end lifecycle coverage, including proposal development, budgeting, award management, and compliance, delivered through a single, integrated system rather than disconnected point solutions. Vendors with deep ERP, HR, and identity integrations are well-positioned to extend their market leadership as institutions consolidate research administration onto fewer platforms. At the same time, solutions that have shown a sharp rise in innovation demonstrate that smaller, more agile vendors can rapidly close the gap with established suites, particularly as narrative analysis, generative AI, and agentic AI capabilities become decisive market differentiators. Compliance functionality spanning IRB, IACUC, and conflict-of-interest management will likely deepen further as research portfolios grow more complex and institutions face increasing pressure to demonstrate audit-ready governance. Vendors with narrower pre-award and compliance footprints will need to expand functional breadth or strengthen integration partnerships to remain competitive as usability and innovation expectations continue to rise across the market.

EVALUATION AND METHODOLOGY SUMMARY

Vendor solutions are positioned on the StarChart™ based on a proprietary algorithm that leverages usability and innovation data points. Usability data points include institutional usability surveys, functional breadth, segment presence, and demonstrated scalability. Innovation data points benchmark each solution's ability to address unique functional and operational requirements and the vendor's ability to sustain the innovation at scale.

Tambellini conducts proprietary, original research, and information used in the StarChart is derived from System Usability Scale (SUS) survey results, vendor surveys, interviews, selection data, and other information sourced from Tambellini Analysts, Advisors, and the Research team as appropriate. Usability is evaluated across criteria categories, including cost, implementation, US market segment presence, functional solution breadth, customer support, software release cadence, implementation, training, and customer experience. Innovation is evaluated across criteria categories, including vendor company and resource profiles, functional solution breadth, integrations, security, partnerships, and capacity for future and sustained innovation.

In 2024, Tambellini introduced three orbits as part of its StarCharts, including Commanders, Navigators, and Specialists. Orbits in this framework represent the path and reach of a solution's innovation and usability in the technological universe. The concept of an orbit allows us to visualize how closely aligned a vendor is with core market needs, as well as the extent to which they impact and are interconnected with the broader ecosystem.

- **Commanders** stand at the forefront of innovation and usability, leading the industry with groundbreaking technologies and user-centric designs. Solutions in this orbit command the highest category, distinguished by their visionary approach and the transformative impact of their solutions. Commanders set the benchmarks for what is possible, pushing the boundaries of technology and usability to new heights. Their leadership is characterized by a consistent track record of excellence, significant market influence, and the ability to anticipate and shape future trends. Commanders not only excel in their offerings but also drive the industry forward, inspiring change and innovation across the technology landscape.
- **Navigators** demonstrate a balanced blend of innovation and usability, guiding their customers through the complexities of the technology landscape with reliable and forward-thinking solutions. Positioned in the middle category, Navigators have successfully expanded their capabilities beyond niche specialization to offer more comprehensive and adaptable technologies. Solutions in this orbit are marked by their ability to steer development and adoption in promising directions, leveraging emerging trends and customer insights to navigate the market effectively. Navigators represent a critical bridge between focused expertise and broader market leadership, offering versatile and evolving solutions.
- **Specialists** represent vendor solutions designed to operate in a specific niche or aspect of technology. While they may not yet showcase broad innovation or high usability across

a wide range of criteria, their focused, targeted solutions carve out significant value within their domain. Specialists are recognized for their deep understanding and capabilities in particular areas, making them valuable partners for specific needs. Their concentrated approach allows for specialized offerings that meet distinct market demands.

Tambellini's proprietary algorithm uses more than a hundred data points to position solutions on the StarChart, including information from surveys, vendor briefings, industry knowledge, institutional interviews, and more. All vendor solutions in each StarChart are evaluated using the exact same methodology and algorithm based on institutional criteria deemed most important by higher education.

Additionally, Tambellini applies proprietary weighting to every StarChart, to ensure institutional criteria deemed most important in the current year's market, according to our research, has an appropriate impact on the final score. This weighting is applied consistently across all vendors and products in each StarChart. Incomplete information provided by vendors lowers the usability and innovation scores for their products. Tambellini reviews vendor survey responses against our body of research to ensure accuracy.

THE FUTURE CAMPUS

Tambellini's Future Campus™ Framework complements the StarCharts, providing additional clarity on an institution's needs and requirements, and ultimately helping to inform and guide their modernization. Tambellini analysts have identified that resilient institutions prepared to thrive through the changing digital landscape need to address a core set of problems—such as offering in-demand programs and experiences with proven employment outcomes, attracting and enrolling the right students, delivering the right experiences to retain and graduate students, modernizing operations, and right-sizing technical debt—to name a few.

Solving these problems requires a focus on people, process, data, and technology in parallel to propel institutions to the next state—their future campus. The Future Campus is Tambellini's vision and framework where innovation and cutting-edge technology converge to create a sustainable, leading higher education technology ecosystem. Not every institution will successfully make the transition. We are living through a pivotal turning point, forcing institutions to modernize at an unprecedented pace in order to remain competitive.