



From Form-Fill to Operating System: NIRF 2026 Readiness

A strategic approach to transition from last-minute form filling to integrated year-round ranking readiness

A Proposal for Higher Education Institutions | September, 2025



Aurobindo Saxena

Founder & CEO, RAYSolute Consultants

Why This Now: The Critical Timing for NIRF 2026



Critical Timing for NIRF 2026 Success

NIRF 2026 winners are shaped this year; efforts now matter more than last-minute actions to succeed.



Growth in Participation and Visibility

Rising participation, new categories, and visibility raise the stakes for institutions aiming to excel.



Early Strategic Preparation is Key

Start early with **strategic** plans to leverage evolving NIRF trends and stay competitive.



What Changed in NIRF 2025 & Implications for 2026

Key updates and actionable insights for institutional readiness in NIRF 2026



SDG category enhanced to measure

SDG-aligned evidence strengthens
OI/Perception and public transparency.



Implement penalty for retracted research

Track retractions and exclude retracted items
to protect RP credibility; implement quarterly
integrity scans.



Retain five core evaluation heads

The fundamental assessment areas remain
unchanged: Teaching, Learning & Resources
(TLR), Research & Professional Practice (RP),
Graduation Outcomes (GO), Outreach &
Inclusivity (OI), and Perception (PR).



Build integrity and SDG evidence year-round

Institutions should consistently document
integrity and SDG-related achievements
throughout the year to avoid last-minute
preparation and improve their NIRF 2026
performance.

NIRF Through an Administrator's Lens: Policy Alignment

Understanding policy roles in NIRF inputs, equivalence, and compliance challenges



UGC Focus on Staffing Norms

Addresses staffing norms, PhD/qualification rules, workload, and governance ensuring hygiene of inputs like TLR, FQE, and FSR.



AIU Focus on Degree Equivalence

Ensures degree equivalence and mobility to enable clean pathways for higher studies tracking under Graduation Outcomes (GO).



Policy Compliance vs Ranking Success

Policy compliance alone does not guarantee ranking success; gaps cause NIRF point leakage via auditability and continuity issues.

Your 2025 Performance Snapshot: Insights and Opportunities

Analyze recent NIRF trends, peer benchmarking, and identify key improvement areas for strategic growth.



ANALYZE LAST 2-3 NIRF CYCLES BY CORE HEADS

Review trendlines for Research & Professional Practice, Graduation Outcomes, and other critical parameters to understand performance trajectory over recent years.



DEFINE PEER SET SELECTION LOGIC

Select relevant peer institutions including state public, private, deemed, and autonomous colleges to ensure accurate benchmarking and competitive analysis.



IDENTIFY 3 HEADLINE GAPS AND 3 TRACTABLE GAINS

Pinpoint top three performance gaps and three actionable improvement areas, each contributing 1–2 NIRF points, to target for focused enhancement and scoring uplift.

Three Silent Leaks Impacting NIRF Scores

Identify and address ranking pitfalls to protect NIRF performance year-round

1



Ensure affiliation hygiene to capture all publications

Inconsistent author names and institute strings lead to missed publications and citations, negatively impacting the Research and Professional Practice (RP) score.

2



Prepare audit-ready evidence for placements and higher studies

Placement and higher studies data often lack proper documentation for audits, which affects the Graduation Outcomes (GO) score.

3



Maintain integrity with quarterly retraction scans and SDG evidence

Absence of regular retraction monitoring and no registry for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) evidence weakens scores in RP and SDG parameters.

Our Solution: A NIRF Operating System (Year-Round)



1

Evidence Room System

Sub-metric organized, **verifier-first** system with comprehensive **audit trails** ensuring full accountability.

2

Affiliation Hygiene Pack

Uses **canonical strings**, **ORCID compliance**, and a pre-submission checklist to ensure data accuracy.

3

Outcomes Proof SOP

Includes **CTC/EPF/attestation** policies and **higher studies verification** for outcome validation.

4

Quarterly Integrity Scan

Baseline assessments plus **third-party attestations** ensure ongoing **data integrity** across metrics.

5

Monthly Mock-NIRF Log

A **sensitivity model** targeting point-gain sprints through exception tracking and mock evaluations.



Data Governance & Integrity: Auditor Expectations

1



Ensure provenance, version control, and verifier sign-offs for all data

Maintain clear records tracing data origin, track all versions systematically, and secure verifier approvals to uphold data integrity throughout processes.

2



Update retraction-risk watchlist and corrections SOP quarterly

Regularly review and refresh the list monitoring potential data retractions and standard operating procedures for corrections to mitigate compliance risks.

3



Promote a “No surprises” documentation culture before submission month

Encourage proactive and transparent documentation practices to avoid last-minute compliance issues and ensure smooth audit readiness.

Research & Professional Practice: From Volume to Verifiability



DISAMBIGUATE AUTHORS USING AUTHOR IDS AND ORCID

Enable clear identification of researchers by integrating standardized author identifiers like ORCID to reduce confusion and enhance data accuracy.



IMPLEMENT CANONICAL AFFILIATION STYLE CARDS FOR

Standardize institutional representation with consistent affiliation style cards to improve clarity and uniformity across research outputs.



ENSURE HCP PIPELINE AND DATASETS ARE OPEN WHERE

Promote transparency and accessibility by making High-Confidence Proofs (HCP) pipelines and related datasets open to the extent feasible.



SYNCHRONIZE SPONSORED PROJECTS AND CONSULTANCY

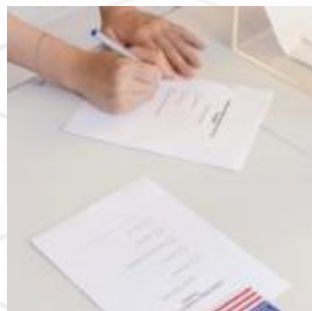
Align Letters of Agreement (LoAs), Utilization Certificates (UCs), and Statements of Expenditure (SoEs) with financial records to maintain accuracy and compliance.

Graduation Outcomes: Proof That Sticks



TRIANGULATE PLACEMENTS DATA FOR ACCURACY

Use multiple sources such as offer letters, CTC details, and EPF records to ensure the reliability of placement information.



VERIFY HIGHER STUDIES ADMISSIONS THOROUGHLY

Combine admit letters with registrar verification trails to validate higher education claims effectively.



CONFIRM ALUMNI EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Where feasible, directly verify employment details through alumni confirmations to strengthen data authenticity.



COMPUTE MEDIAN SALARY WITH CLEAR POLICIES

- Maintain a median salary workbook that explicitly states inclusions and exclusions to provide transparent salary metrics.
- Median salary computation policy (inclusions/exclusions)” and “de-duplication rules.

Outreach, Inclusivity & SDG: Building Baselines & Transparency



Track diversity and accessibility metrics

Monitor diversity metrics for students and faculty, scholarships awarded, and conduct accessibility audits to ensure inclusivity across the institution.



Establish SDG baselines for sustainability

Set baselines for Sustainable Development Goals including energy, water, waste management, diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI), and outreach efforts to measure progress effectively.



Implement third-party attestations and open data

Use third-party attestations and maintain an open data micro-site to enhance transparency, credibility, and stakeholder trust in reporting.

Perception Management: Peer & Employer Without Theatrics



1

Workshops

2

Facts Page

3

Employer

4

Entity Graphs

5

Sensitivity

Host and participate in **workshops** producing **proceedings** to boost academic **visibility** and **credibility**.

Maintain a clean **facts page** optimized for **web crawlers** to enhance **discoverability** and ensure accurate info.

Engage **employer councils**, organize **capstone showcases**, and manage **testimonials** to strengthen ties.

Clean and unify names across **NIRF**, **Scopus**, **WoS**, and **Wikidata** for consistent data representation.

Use a **sensitivity model** to identify feasible **1–2 point** gains, optimizing efforts for maximum impact.

Leverage What-If Scenarios and Prioritization for Impact

Use targeted sensitivity models and prioritization matrices to maximize intervention effectiveness and point gains

1

FSR Impact

Model how faculty hiring, PhD-qualified share, and workload norms change the Faculty–Student Ratio (FSR) headroom and overall score.

2

HCP Effect

Launch high-confidence proofs (HCP) sprints—auditable evidence packets for placements, higher studies, projects.

3

GO Recovery

Project gains from **GO proof recovery** initiatives, identifying opportunities to reclaim points and optimize operational efficiency through targeted efforts.

4

Prioritize

Balance **impact**, **effort**, and **risk** factors to guide focused interventions that deliver maximum point gain with optimal resource use and minimal exposure.



About RAYSolute Consultants

Inspiring people to invest in education




- 1 Founded by Mr. Aurobindo Saxena, **RAYSolute** Consultants is a Bengaluru-based consulting firm that specializes in the education sector, with Mr. Saxena serving as its Founder and CEO.
- 2 Our name, RAYSolute (pronounced as Resolute), is inspired by the four Indian Vedas (**R**igveda, **A**tharvaveda, **Y**ajurveda and **S**amaveda), which are ancient Hindu scriptures that are an epitome of ancient human body of knowledge and wisdom. We felt that the core of consulting companies is typically their unique "body of knowledge", so what could be better than our Vedas to get inspired from for naming our consulting firm.
- 3 We provide expert guidance and support across Strategy, Operations, Finance, HR, IT, Marketing, Sales and Change Management to help our clients solve complex business problems, capitalize on new opportunities, and achieve their goals.
- 4 We are a team of global education consultants who are dedicated to helping educational institutions and companies to navigate through a variety of challenges and opportunities.
- 5 Our team is made up of experienced professionals who are passionate about education and dedicated to helping others succeed.



Approve and adopt the strategic
roadmap to take pole position for the
NIRF 2026 Rankings.

For further information, please contact:

 **Aurobindo Saxena**
Founder & CEO, RAYSolute Consultants

 **+91 9891 321 279**

 **aurobindo@raysolute.com**

 **www.raysolute.com**

