

## Vice President Finance & Operations and Chief Financial Officer

---



# Athabasca University



## Recruiting Leaders

For more information, please contact:

Rick Vogel

Founding Principal

[rick@thevogelgroup.ca](mailto:rick@thevogelgroup.ca)

780.665.4965 ext. 101

the **vogel group**  
Recruiting Leaders

## VP FINANCE & OPERATIONS AND CFO ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

### ▼ ABOUT ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

Athabasca University (AU) is a renowned Canadian open education post-secondary institution located in Athabasca, Alberta. Founded in 1970, it is dedicated to the removal of barriers that restrict access to and success in university-level study and increasing educational opportunities for adult learners worldwide.

AU is one of four Comprehensive Academic and Research Universities (CARUs) in the province. AU is a public, board-governed, open, and online university serving more than 35,000 student learners across Alberta, Canada and around the world.

As Canada's leading open university, AU provides flexible learning options that enable students to study at their own pace and from any location. This approach makes education accessible to individuals who may not be able to attend traditional 'brick-and-mortar' institutions due to various reasons such as work commitments, geographic constraints, or personal circumstances. AU utilizes innovative online learning technologies and methodologies to deliver its courses. Students can access course materials, participate in discussions, submit assignments, and interact with instructors and fellow students through the university's virtual learning environment. This platform enables collaborative learning, facilitates engagement, and ensures effective communication between students and faculty.

With Faculties spanning health, science and technology, humanities, and business – AU provides more than 70 undergraduate and graduate programs in ways that are uniquely accessible and responsive to today's demands of life and work. AU offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate degree programs, as well as certificate and diploma courses, across various disciplines.

AU is committed to providing high-quality education and ensuring rigorous academic standards. The university's faculty members are experts in their respective fields and are actively involved in research and scholarship. They provide guidance, support, and mentorship to students throughout their academic journey. One of the unique features of AU is its open admission policy, which allows individuals from diverse educational backgrounds to pursue their studies. This policy means that students do not require specific prerequisites or prior qualifications to enroll in most undergraduate programs. It provides opportunities for lifelong learners, adult students, and individuals seeking career advancement or personal development.

Moreover, AU is known for its learner-centered approach, emphasizing student engagement, interaction, and personalized learning experiences. The university fosters a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students can connect with peers, collaborate on projects, and receive individualized attention from instructors.

While AU primarily operates online, it is based in the beautiful region of Athabasca, Alberta. This location provides administrative services, research facilities, and a hub for faculty and staff.

Approaching an exciting new phase of strategic planning in late 2023 and guided by a new President, Alex Clark, AU is now seeking to build on its 50 years of growth as Canada's leader and innovator in distance and online education. With a newly established and highly inclusive Senior Leadership Team, who are committed to supporting all team members to contribute and grow and focussed on building an innovative growth-oriented working culture: AU is primed for an exciting and bold next phase.

We invite you to visit the Athabasca University website at [www.athabascau.ca](http://www.athabascau.ca).

## ▼ ABOUT THE TOWN OF ATHABASCA

A vibrant rural community in which to live, work and relax, the town of Athabasca is nestled in the picturesque Athabasca River Valley, just 150 km north of Edmonton, Alberta.

The Town of Athabasca serves as the health, education, shopping, and service-centre for the region. The surrounding area offer something for just about everyone: nature lovers, cottagers, campers, fishers, hunters, golfers, sports enthusiasts, history buffs, retirees, business entrepreneurs and those seeking to escape the frenetic pace of big-city life.

During the fur-trade era, Athabasca Landing, as the town was then called, became known as the "Gateway to the North," a jumping-off point for those travelling along the Athabasca River north to the Peace River and to Fort Chipewyan. Today, the town is the modern gateway to the new North Country, its economic prospects, natural resource industries, tourism opportunities, and natural beauty. While the Town of Athabasca is steeped in history and tradition, it is very much focused on the future.

AU will offer relocation assistance for the right candidate, should you decide to relocate to reside in the Town of Athabasca. As a resident of the town or county of Athabasca, or elsewhere in Alberta, you can elect to work virtually from your home combined with our offices on our beautiful campus.

To discover the Town and Region of Athabasca, please visit:

<http://www.visitathabasca.ca> and <http://www.athabasca.ca>

## ▼ THE ROLE

As a member of the leadership team, reporting to the President and working closely in partnership with the Provost and the Vice-President Academic, the Vice President Finance & Operations and CFO ("VPFO") supports Athabasca University's (AU) academic, teaching and research mission and strategic direction through planning, directing and overseeing the administrative and business functions of the university.

Through three direct reports including Director Financial reporting & Operational Services, Chief Internal Auditor and the Director, Financial Strategic Initiatives and Operations, the VPFO leads a full team of 43 professionals across a varied portfolio that includes financial planning, budgeting, capital projects, facilities operations, internal audit, emergency management/

business continuity planning, enterprise risk management, procurement, contract services, and financial services. The VPFO is responsible for the overall quality of services, meeting legal and reporting requirements within portfolio areas, deploying resources, and planning improvements that enhance the University's ability to carry out its academic mission and strategic plan.

The VPFO is an Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer at AU.

**In all facets of this role, the VPFO endeavors to integrate and advance the University's commitments to EDI and with Indigenous Peoples and communities, conciliation.**

The VPFO will demonstrate authentic and ongoing commitment and respect for the Athabasca region and community by facilitating and building relationships, as appropriate, within the town and region of Athabasca and establishing a regular presence at events and meetings in the area. Travel will be required for the purpose of attending meetings, consulting with employees, and participating in senior executive retreats. In accordance with the requirements under the current Investment Management Agreement ("IMA") with the Government of Alberta, the Executive Members of the University, in consultation with the president, will be expected to work up to 50% of their time in the University's location in Athabasca.

Preference will be given to candidates willing to relocate to, or who currently reside in, the Athabasca region.

## **Duties and Responsibilities**

### **Financial Planning, Reporting and Operations**

Working closely with, and in support of the Provost, the VPFO is responsible for developing, coordinating and managing the University's operating and capital budgets, and assets; and aligning resource allocation to promote and achieve the academic, teaching and research mission of the university.

The role extends across accounting, forecasting and reporting on the budgets and financial transactions of AU, including: accounting, reporting, procurement, contract services, accounts payables, accounts receivables, treasury, and investments are in compliance with all laws and regulations and meet the needs of the University in achieving its mission and fulfilling its mandate. This includes overseeing the operation and maintenance of AU's owned and leased properties and the delivery of facilities-related services.

The VPFO has responsibility and accountability over the full lifecycle of third-party contracts and procurement agreements. As part of the Senior Leadership Team, VPFO also supports Collaboration and Partnership discussions to enhance the outcomes of the negotiation and the contracting process. The VPFO provides advice to the President and other senior internal stakeholders in the process of development of contracts to protect AU from undue risk, liabilities, consistency of the relationship objectives with strategic objectives.

Under the coordination of the Provost's Office, the VPFO works collaboratively with the Senior Leadership Team to contribute to the university's Integrated Resource Planning (IRP) process,

providing advice, insight, and information supporting both the IRP process and its success.

### Coordination, support and governance

Reporting to the President, the VPFO is a member of AU's Senior Leadership Team and provides advice, insight, and information to, and collaborates with the President, the Provost and Vice- President, Academic, and various other members of the AU senior leadership team in the planning and implementation of core initiatives in support of the university's academic mission.

With the mandate to enable and advance the financial and operational health of AU in service of AU's academic mission, the VPFO is accountable for the overall quality of services, meeting internal and external reporting requirements within portfolio areas, enabling the effective deployment of financial and tangible resources, and planning improvements that enhance AU's ability to carry out its academic mission and strategic plan. Given a continuous improvement environment, the VPFO is able to demonstrate and lead a nuanced balance of innovation and effectiveness within a regulated environment.

As directed by the President, the VPFO supports and provides advice to the Board of Governors and General Faculties Council, including the respective standing and ad-hoc sub-committees of the two governing bodies. The VPFO works effectively with the Board of Governors and its committees.

### Enterprise Risk and Resilience

The VPFO ensures the development, implementation and coordination of the University's Enterprise Risk Management, Emergency Management, Business Continuity and Insurance programs, with a primary objective of achieving risk identification, assessment, monitoring and organizational resiliency with respect to risks across the scope of Athabasca University.

### Facilities, Services and Capital Project Management

The VPFO ensures that AU's physical facilities, grounds and capital construction projects all support the achievement of the University's academic mission and strategic plan, and are in compliance with all laws and regulations.

### Internal Audit

The VPFO oversees the development, implementation and management of a broad, comprehensive program of internal audit at Athabasca University. In support of the University's overall mission, this critical function assists the University to accomplish its goals and objectives through a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluating and improving risk management, control, compliance, and governance processes. In overseeing this role, it is critical to ensure it provides independent, objective assurance, advisory, and investigative services to assist AU management and the Board of Governors in the effective discharge of their responsibilities.

## External Liaison and Relationships

The VPFO engages regularly with external stakeholders, including officials with local, provincial and federal levels of government, and the Office of the Auditor General, and other agencies related to areas of responsibility. In particular, the VPFO works closely with other post-secondary institutions and the Ministry of Advanced Education to convey information, exchange ideas, develop partnerships and advocate for policies and initiatives that are supportive of the advancement of open, distance and online education, and post-secondary education in general. The VPFO strives to establish positive working relationships with all levels of government and relevant external stakeholders to support and promote the reputation and success of AU.

## ▼ THE CANDIDATE

### Core Competencies

- ▼ A university degree combined with an accounting designation (a graduate degree in business, finance or accounting would be considered an asset).
- ▼ Fifteen or more years of progressively advancing professional and management experience.
- ▼ A minimum of seven years at the management level, of which at least five years are in a senior management position.
- ▼ Experience in post-secondary or public sector management.
- ▼ Experience in a unionized environment.

### Personal Characteristics

#### Supervision

The incumbent is expected to manage independently, with limited direct supervision in all areas of responsibility, routinely consulting with the President, Provost and Vice-President Academic, Senior Leadership Team members, and other leadership as appropriate.

The VPFO has executive level oversight across all areas of the Vice President Finance portfolio, with direct supervisory responsibility of the portfolio's senior leadership team on a continuous basis.

The incumbent is responsible for recruitment, performance evaluations, development and training for the portfolio's senior leadership team, as well as coaching and motivating staff and project team members to develop positive, high trust working relationships and operate effectively as a team including problem solving and conflict resolutions. The VPFO has responsibility for developing a culture which embraces AU's I-CARE values within the portfolio through coaching and motivating staff and project team members to develop positive, high trust

working relationships and operate effectively as a team including problem solving and conflict resolutions.

The VPFO promotes an environment within the portfolio that facilitates continual improvement and employee development to maximize employee potential and optimize processes to support the University in meeting its strategic goals and mandate.

### **Impact of Service or Product**

In close collaboration with the President and the Provost, the VPFO is responsible for leading the formulation and implementation of the University's financial planning, operating and reporting services and has significant responsibilities for financial planning and for identifying and managing financial risks.

The VPFO is responsible for leading the formulation and implementation of strategy, operations and reporting in all areas reporting to the position, including but not limited to enterprise risk and resiliency, procurement, internal audit, and facilities. The incumbent has significant responsibility for the oversight of the planning and operation and identification and management of risks in each of these areas.

A solid and proven professional judgement is necessary as errors in judgement, decision making, or inaccurate advice or information will have serious consequences and impact on the University.

### **Independence of Action**

This incumbent is expected to manage independently in all areas of responsibility. Required to manage work to ensure all deliverables are met on a timely basis.

The incumbent will have regular contact and work collaboratively with the President, Provost, Senior Leadership Team, and other internal and external stakeholders, concerning matters requiring input, clarification, or resolution, and will be expected to use proper judgement and effective diplomacy in all interactions.

Requires a demonstrated ability to work collaboratively and to handle difficult situations while maintaining effective relationships. Must be able to think logically, solve problems and be critically objective with an ability to develop innovative solutions to problems.

The incumbent is responsible for building and maintain professional relationships that support assigned functions.

Must be able to work independently or in a team environment.

### **Complexity**

The incumbent must be able to deal with multiple complex issues on a day-to-day basis and have demonstrated the ability to manage multiple staff and effectively delegate issues and elicit solutions.

*We understand and appreciate our clients' ever-increasing desire for candidates to reflect the communities in which they work and live. The Vogel Group is committed to inclusivity and diversity as we search for outstanding leadership talent for our clients.*

▼ **For more information or to apply, please contact:**

Rick Vogel, ICD.D  
Founding Principal  
780.665.4965 ext. 101  
rick@thevogelgroup.ca

**The Vogel Group** is a leadership search firm with offices in Alberta and Ontario conducting national searches for a wide range of clients. We work with like-minded organizations that value a partnership based on integrity, authenticity and an unwavering commitment to excellence.