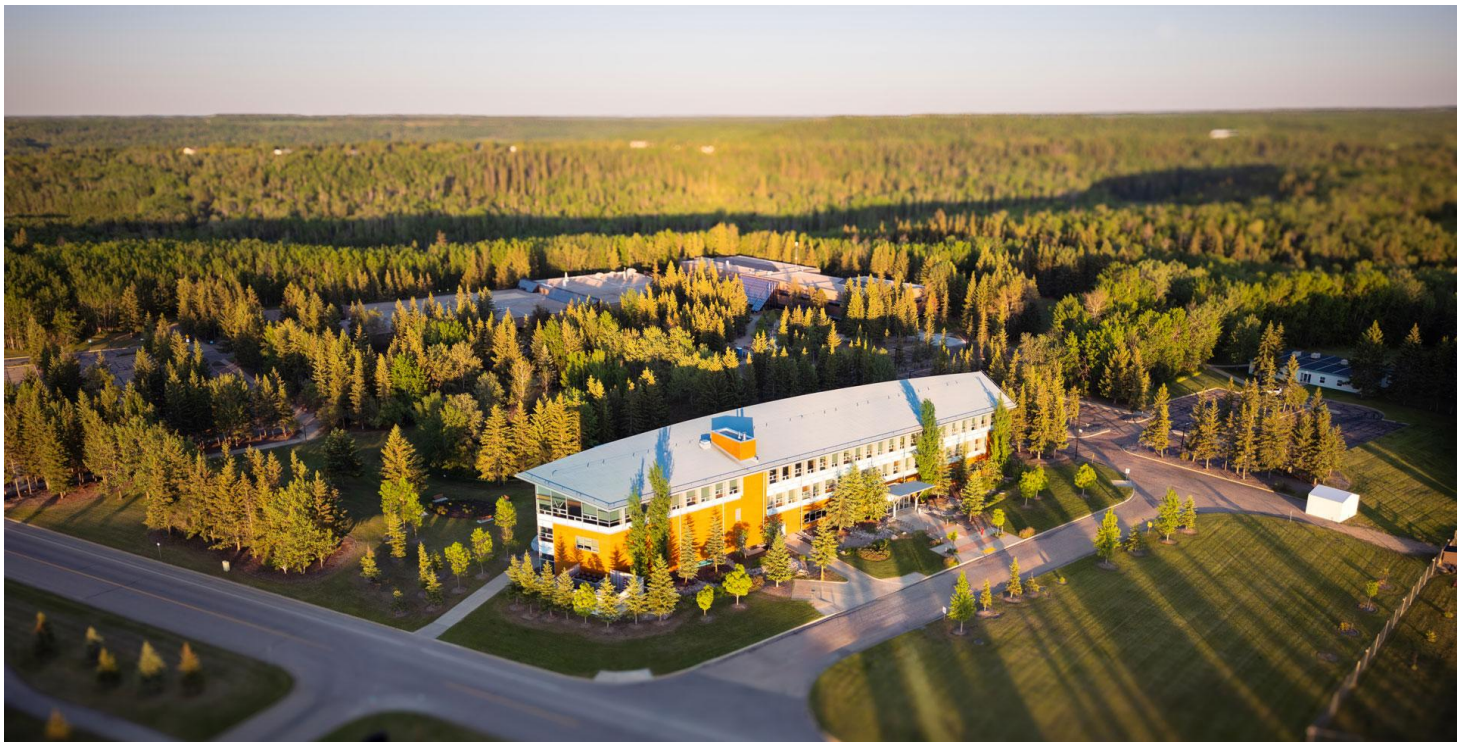
Position Specification

Director, Financial Operations

Remote (Alberta)

Confidential



Institution Description

As Canada's leading open university, Athabasca University's (AU) approach to accessible yet transformative education and research is truly distinctive. Its academic mission is to remove barriers to post-secondary education for learners, regardless of their age, location, career, or educational background.

Based in the beautiful region of Athabasca, 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 37,000 students across Alberta, Canada, and around the world.

With faculties spanning health, science, 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 like and work.

AU seeks to be an agile and inclusive workplace in which all team members can grow, make their highest contribution, and each make a difference to our academic vision and mission.

Led by President Dr. Alex Clark, AU is embarking on its exciting next chapter with the launch of its new strategic plan. Drawing from five decades of growth in distance and online education, we aim to reinforce our position as Canada's foremost innovator in open and accessible learning. With the recent formation of an inclusive Senior Leadership Team dedicated to empowering every team member to contribute and thrive, AU stands poised for an exciting and ambitious next stage of development.

Almost 70% of undergraduate program students are the first in their families to get a degree.

Link to AU's Strategic Plan - Like No Other

To learn more, visit www.athabascau.ca

Scope and Responsibilities

Reporting to the Vice President, Finance and Operations & Chief Financial Officer, the Director, Financial Operations is a member of the senior finance leadership team that provides advice and guidance to AU on all financial matters. The Director is a key part of the team that leads the cultural and organizational growth focused on a continuous improvement growth mindset that leads to operational excellence.

The Director oversees the Financial Operations department, which includes the general accounting functions responsible for recording all financial transactions for AU, including revenue and expenses, accounts payable, accounts receivable, treasury, investments, procurement, and compliance reporting.

The incumbent is responsible for leadership and management of financial compliance reporting and operational services on behalf of the university in an efficient, innovative, and professional manner. As a senior leader, the incumbent provides strategic direction, overall leadership, information, training, support, and expert advice to interest holders across the university.

In addition to managing the daily operation of the Financial Operations department, the incumbent is responsible for leading the development, implementation, and monitoring of financial and procurement policies and procedures in alignment with applicable regulations, legislation, public-sector accounting standards, best practices, and industry trends.

As a senior leader, the Director contributes to the university's Strategic Plan and is instrumental in the development of financial and procurement strategies that support accountability and efficient, effective, and prudent stewardship of the university's financial resources. The incumbent also provides critical financial related advice and information to the university community including senior leadership, various committees, employees, and students.

The Director is responsible for driving improvement and innovation of processes and technology, including sponsoring and leading application upgrades and implementation initiatives. The incumbent may serve in the capacity of Acting Vice President, Finance and Operations & Chief Financial Officer as required in the absence of the Vice President, Finance and Operations & Chief Financial Officer.

Specific Responsibilities

This is a critical role in Athabasca's continued success and growth. The role is accountable for the following:

Departmental Leadership and Management (60%)

- Effectively leads and manages general accounting operations, investment management oversight, financial compliance reporting, and procurement related functions at all levels, and ensures services are provided in a positive, proactive, effective, efficient, and timely manner;
- Develops a team culture of service excellence that emphasizes the value of understanding business drivers and requirements in providing proactive advice to clients;
- Manages the university's financial systems and information and ensures proper internal controls and processes are in place to safeguard information and university assets;
- Monitors and ensures compliance with all financial reporting, financial operations, and procurement related policies, procedures, processes, and related internal controls;
- Maximizes the effectiveness of operations within a framework of fiscal, legal, legislative, and audit requirements;
- Facilitates the resolution of complex or sensitive financial reporting, financial operations, investment, and procurement related issues;
- Ensures effective communication in the department and with key internal and external interest holders;
- Works collaboratively with all other areas of AU to ensure financial compliance reporting, financial operations and procurement systems, services, procedures, processes, and related information are managed and maintained effectively;
- Actively participates in applicable university committees and groups as required;

- Manages special assignments and projects, and develops recommendations to improve systems, services, procedures, and processes in Financial Operations;
- Oversees all accounting functions of the university, ensuring that financial transactions are carried out in a timely and efficient manner, financial records are reliable, accurate, and secure, and that data integrity is maintained;
- Ensures appropriate financial policies, procedures, and internal controls exist, remain up-to-date, and are operating effectively;
- Oversees the preparation and accuracy of annual financial statements and the facilitation of the external financial audits under tight timelines. Maintains strong relationships with the external auditors to ensure operational effectiveness and positive audit-management relations. Ensures the external financial audits are coordinated effectively and that all issues raised by the auditors are appropriately responded to in an effective and timely manner;
- Attends all formal meetings with the external auditors;
- Advises the Vice President, Finance and Operations & Chief Financial Officer of any concerns or complications that may arise or be identified in the internal and external audits;
- Ensures preparation of timely and accurate financial statements/reports, including reports through the Office of the Vice President Finance and Operations & Chief Financial Officer to the Ministry of Advanced Education, the Board of Governors and its standing committees, and answers information requests/enquiries as required;
- Monitors financial reporting obligations and ensures that reporting deadlines are met;
- Ensures compliance with financial accounting standards, reporting and filing requirements, statutory legislation, and related business practices;
- Provides strategic direction, advice, and leadership to the AU community with respect to financial compliance reporting, financial operations, procurement, and related functions;
- Develops and implements policies, procedures, best practices, and systems that focus on achieving performance excellence;
- Ensures the prudent stewardship, safeguarding, and management of cash, debt, trust and endowment assets, including all banking, credit card processing, e-commerce, cash liquidity management, short-term portfolios, investment portfolios, and daily cash flow for AU;
- Monitors best practices, seeks advice from subject matter experts, provides strategic advice and support, and makes recommendations on a broad range of investment, treasury, and debt planning related matters;
- Works closely with expert advisors to develop and maintain external relationships with financial institutions, investment managers, consultants, and other specialists providing services; and,
- As a key financial signing officer, exercises authority and responsibility for approving disbursements pursuant to the university's banking resolutions.

Strategic Leadership (40%)

- Provides leadership to drive the cultural and organizational growth of the department through ongoing continuous improvement and innovation;
- Leads the Financial Operations team in the development and implementation of policies, procedures, and processes that efficiently and effectively support accountability and prudent stewardship of the university's financial resources;
- Leads the development and execution of the department's operational business plan, ensuring objectives align with the university's overall goals and mandate, critical success factors, and that performance metrics are implemented to assess its effectiveness;
- Establishes, manages, and monitors the department's operating and capital budgets, ensuring resources are allocated effectively and expenditures remain within approved funding limits while supporting organizational priorities;

- Prepares regular forecasts, analyzes budget variances and financial trends, and provides timely recommendations to support decision-making, financial sustainability, and achievement of departmental objectives;
- Provides leadership in the execution of the department's strategic direction and operations in the areas of financial operations, financial reporting, and procurement and contract services. Seeks continuous improvement of processes in the units and in services provided to the university;
- Provides advice to the senior leadership and various committees in relation to the development and operationalization of initiatives that support the university's financial sustainability, effectiveness, and operational efficiency;
- Ensures continual review, research, development, and implementation of new and emerging trends and legislative requirements related to financial operations;
- Leads research on best practices in Financial Operations and ensures the development and implementation of an effective and efficient financial oversight, accountability, and stewardship strategy for long term sustainability;
- Balances potentially conflicting needs of multiple interest holders when making recommendations; and,
- In collaboration with senior leaders, identifies and rates finance related risks, develops mitigation strategies, monitors these risks, executes tactics, and alerts the Vice President, Finance and Operations & Chief Financial Officer when new risks emerge or the status of a known risk change.



Desired Candidate Abilities, Background and Experience

Given the role this individual will play in Athabasca's continued growth and success, it is essential that the successful candidate possess the following education, experience, and personal characteristics:

Education

- An Undergraduate degree in Management, Commerce, Accounting, or related field is required;

- Master's in Business Administration is an asset; and,
- Certified Professional Accounting Designation (CPA) is required.

Experience

- 10+ years of progressively responsible accounting and analytical financial experience, with at least 5 years at the senior management level in a public sector organization;
- Experience in a post-secondary and unionized environment is an asset;
- Extensive knowledge of the Public Sector Accounting Standards and new and emerging trends in the post-secondary sector is required;
- Knowledge of financial services practices in all areas is required, with the proven ability to apply that knowledge to meet the needs and challenges of the university;
- Strong business acumen with demonstrated experience in technical financial concepts, best practice financial processes and financial information systems, financial and managerial accounting, financial operations, and reporting is required;
- Exposure and experience across investment, treasury, and dept planning is an asset;
- Change management and strong leadership experience is essential;
- Experience leading and managing teams virtually is an asset; and,
- Demonstrated ability to achieve results through influence as opposed to authority.

Personal / Professional Attributes

- **Visionary**: Understands and interprets financial trends and addresses issues and challenges with clarity, energy, and confidence. Has the ability to adapt to new and changing situations through the adoption of best practices;
- **Professional**: Acts as both a leader and an integral member of several teams. Possesses high ethical standards and maintains trustworthy relationships, including an honest, open, and consistent approach to working with colleagues, staff members, executives, student representatives, and external interest holders;
- **Leadership**: Acts as a leader, coach, mentor, and positive role model with the ability to initiate, influence, motivate, and delegate. Builds trust through demonstrated objectivity and consistency. Gains commitment of staff through a high standard of integrity;
- **Service Orientated**: Exhibits an engaging personal style that builds a service-orientated, value- added financial management culture. Understands the structure and influences in non-profit, particularly in public sector organizations;
- **Pragmatic Decision Maker**: Recognizes priorities and changing approaches. Shows common sense and intuitive judgment. Able to make, implement, and act on operational decisions and follow through on outcomes. A proven professional judgment skill set is essential along with established problem-solving skills and strong analytical abilities;
- **Organized**: Demonstrates solid time management abilities to manage multiple priorities and meet tight deadlines that come with various competing demands and peaks in volume of work;
- **Communications**: Exhibits strong written and verbal presentation, facilitation, and negotiation skills and is an active listener. Excellent interpersonal skills are required to exercise tact and diplomacy regarding sensitive and confidential issues;
- **Systems Aptitude**: Excellent knowledge of financial information systems, e-commerce, word processing, spreadsheet, and database computer programs, as well as information technology in general; and,
- **Analysis/Problem Solving**: Possesses excellent problem-solving skills with a strong aptitude for financial analysis.

Attractions

This role provides an opportunity to join a post-secondary institution that is poised for continued growth. Other attractions include the opportunity to:

- Work with an institution that is transforming the lives of others through open education and innovation;
- Work in a highly collaborative finance environment, partnering with leaders across the institution to support strategic and operational objectives;
- Join a high-performing, client-focused organization seeking an innovative, service-oriented leader who can bring fresh ideas, drive positive change, and support an evolving culture of excellence;
- Work virtually, while still building community engagement in Athabasca; and,
- Be part of a team that is inclusive, effective, and collaborative.

Athabasca University has engaged the Executive Search Firm, DHR Global, to manage this search. To explore this exciting opportunity further, please submit a resume and cover letter to AUfinance@dhrglobal.com by December 15th, 2026.

Contact Information

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