



Northern Arizona University

Vice President and Director of Athletics

About Northern Arizona University

Founded in 1899, Northern Arizona University (NAU) has grown into a nationally recognized engine of opportunity—renowned as a public R1 research institution with a lasting commitment to student access and success. Set across 880 forested acres in Flagstaff, Arizona, at an elevation of nearly 7,000 feet, NAU sits at the base of the San Francisco Peaks, surrounded by the world's largest contiguous ponderosa pine forest. The university serves more than 27,000 students, including over 20,000 on the Flagstaff campus.

NAU's mission is to make education accessible and deliver lifelong value. Students learn from world-class faculty, have access to career-driven academic programs and hands-on learning opportunities, and have robust support and a vibrant campus community to enable their success. NAU offers more than 100 undergraduate degree programs and more than 90 graduate programs across a wide range of disciplines. More than 70 percent of the student body calls Arizona home, underscoring NAU's deep commitment to its sense of place and service to community. With a worldwide alumni network that is more than 210,000 strong, NAU has a vibrant community of supporters whose lives and careers have been shaped by this unique institution.

Flagstaff is regularly ranked among the best college towns in the United States and is a year-round destination, with four seasons and 266 days of sunshine per year. As the world's first International Dark Sky City, it is home to the historic Lowell Observatory — where Pluto was discovered — and offers some of the finest stargazing in North America. The city is a year-round outdoor enthusiast's paradise, with world-class hiking, mountain biking, skiing, rock climbing, and fishing within minutes of downtown. Neighboring natural wonders include the Grand Canyon (just 81 miles away), Sedona, Walnut Canyon, Wupatki and Sunset Crater National Monuments, and the Coconino National Forest. A vibrant downtown features award-winning restaurants, craft breweries, eclectic shops, art galleries, and live music — all within a welcoming community known for its friendly spirit and rich cultural heritage.

About the Position and NAU Athletics

Lumberjack Athletics competes as a member of the Big Sky Conference, sponsoring 15 NCAA Division I athletic programs for approximately 300 student-athletes. NAU is the only

NCAA Division I athletics department in the greater Northern Arizona region, and the Lumberjacks have established an extraordinary tradition of competitive excellence and academic success.

Under the leadership of NAU President José Luis Cruz Rivera, NAU Athletics has reached new heights, including 46 conference championships, two team NCAA national championships, six individual NCAA national championships, and the first FCS playoff appearance by NAU Football since 2017. The university's philanthropic momentum tells an equally powerful story: the last five years represent the highest fundraising totals in NAU's history, and with a comprehensive campaign now underway, donor confidence in this university's direction is at an all-time high. As NAU opts in to the House Settlement for the 2026-27 academic year, the university is positioned to leverage these achievements and enter the new era of intercollegiate athletics in a way that is distinctive, mission-aligned, and purpose-driven — advancing student success and competitive excellence, elevating the Lumberjack brand, and building a sustainable operating model designed for the future.

Since 2016, the NAU men's cross country program has been among the most decorated in college athletics, capturing six NCAA Division I national championships. NAU is tied for fourth all time among for NCAA men's cross country championships and the program is deeply embedded into the fabric of the region, which is known as a worldwide training destination for elite runners. The Lumberjacks have earned four Big Sky Presidents' Cups and have swept both the men's and women's All-Sports Trophies in the same year six times. The NAU men have claimed 18 All-Sport Trophies and the NAU women 11, underscoring a culture of sustained excellence across all sports.

Athletic facilities on NAU's campus include the iconic J. Lawrence Walkup Skydome — the second-largest wooden dome structure in the United States — which hosts football, basketball, and indoor track and field; Lumberjack Stadium for soccer and outdoor track; the state-of-the-art Wall Aquatic and Tennis Center; and the Student-Athlete High Performance Center (SAHPC), a premier training and event facility featuring research labs and an altitude chamber. NAU's commitment to the student-athlete experience is reflected department-wide, with athletes across all sports earning record GPAs in recent years.

NAU's vision for athletics is one of purposeful ambition — to build a nationally respected Division I program that fully reflects the university's core values of access, excellence, and community. Athletics at NAU is a catalyst for student recruitment and retention, and a powerful connector between the university and the broader Northern Arizona community. The next VP and Director of Athletics will be charged with elevating the Lumberjack brand, creating vibrant campus experiences, deepening alumni and donor engagement, raising revenue through corporate and philanthropic partnerships to unlock the full potential of our teams, and ensuring that every student-athlete who wears the blue and gold is positioned to succeed — on the field, in the classroom, and in life.

NAU seeks a VP/AD who understands that athletics can and should be an integral partner in advancing the university's mission and vision by increasing institutional visibility, strengthening enrollment pipelines, amplifying NAU's research mission, deepening community ties, stewarding resources, growing revenues, and enriching campus life for all students. The ideal candidate will bring a track record of building genuine, lasting partnerships across academic affairs, student life, alumni relations, advancement,

communications, and community outreach; will have a demonstrated history of leadership to successfully steward resources, refine operations, and grow revenues through ticket sales, partnerships, and philanthropic engagement; and has the capacity to engage deeply as a partner and bridge between athletics programs and communities of supporters. The successful VP/AD will leverage this experience to develop an excellent team of coaches and staff to pursue distinctive excellence and athletic accomplishments, the highest standards of academic achievement, and lead with integrity and partnership throughout the university community — arriving at NAU prepared to lead from a place of institutional citizenship, not departmental isolation.

Scope of Responsibility

The Vice President and Director of Athletics serves as the strategic leader and chief executive of NAU's Division I athletics program. Reporting directly to the President and serving as a member of President's Cabinet, the VP/AD holds comprehensive responsibility for:

- All 15 NCAA Division I intercollegiate sport programs and approximately 350 student-athletes
- Full-time and part-time athletics department staff, including head coaches, assistant coaches, and administrative personnel
- Student-athlete academic support, mental health resources, life skills programming, and graduation success
- Leading the department in alignment with the university's mission and values and in partnership and collaboration with campus colleagues
- Oversight, management, and strategic allocation of the athletics department's multimillion-dollar operating budget
- Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) strategy and structure for resourcing student-athlete opportunities
- Coordination and partnership with athletics staff and coaches, as well as other university divisions, to maximize the activity, public engagement, and revenue generating potential athletics-related facilities, including the Walkup Skydome, SAHPC, Lumberjack Stadium, and the Aquatic and Tennis Center.
- Revenue generation, including fundraising, ticket sales, facility rentals, and corporate and philanthropic partnerships
- NCAA, Big Sky, and MPSF Conference compliance, governance, and institutional representation
- Brand management, communications, media relations, and community engagement

The VP/AD is a visible and influential leader across the NAU campus and throughout the state of Arizona — providing authoritative guidance on the role of intercollegiate athletics within the broader institutional mission and serving as a primary ambassador for the Lumberjack brand to prospective and current students, alumni, donors, and the Northern Arizona community.

Duties and Responsibilities

- Champion NAU's unique student-athlete identity, building Lumberjack pride, celebrating athletic and academic excellence, and positioning Northern Arizona University as a national model for innovation and integrity in collegiate athletics.
- Serve as the primary advisor to the President and Cabinet Leadership on all NCAA and Conference matters, providing strategic counsel on policy, governance, and compliance while representing NAU's interests with vision and integrity.
- Lead a comprehensive fundraising and revenue generation strategy that aligns with the department's evolving priorities — including NIL initiatives — while driving long-term sustainability. Partner with the NAU Advancement | Foundation, Alumni Relations, and Campus Services & Activities to cultivate donor relationships, strengthen stewardship, and expand department and university-wide revenue generation capabilities that support Athletics' resource base and drive university-wide benefit.
- Provide forward-looking strategic direction, establishing and executing short- and long-term goals that align with NAU's aspirations for competitive excellence, institutional identity, and student-athlete success.
- Engage world class Olympic training organizations, teams and individuals in Flagstaff, in the United States and internationally for the use of university training facilities and space to enhance revenue generation, national brand awareness and community support and pride.
- Oversee all department communications and brand positioning — including media relations, storytelling, and digital content — to elevate NAU Athletics locally, regionally, and nationally.
- Represent the university at NCAA, Big Sky, and MPSF Conference meetings and events, advocating for the institution's values and priorities while ensuring full compliance with all governing bodies.
- Ensure full compliance with Arizona Board of Regents policies, cultivating a culture of transparency, accountability, and institutional integrity.
- Serve as a genuine institutional partner — actively engaging with colleagues across Academic Affairs, Strategic Enrollment & Marketing, Student Affairs, Advancement | Foundation, Alumni Relations, the University Budget Office, Campus Services & Activities, and more to identify shared opportunities and bring the resources and reach of athletics to bear on broader university goals and ensuring athletics is consistently experienced as an asset to the entire NAU community.
- Develop a strategic partnership with Strategic Enrollment and Marketing to leverage athletics as a driver of student recruitment and retention — with particular attention to underrepresented and first-generation student populations, as well as strategic entrance into out-of-state markets — ensuring that the student-athlete recruiting pipeline aligns with NAU's broader enrollment strategy.
- Collaborate closely with Academic Affairs to support the academic success, retention, and graduation of student-athletes and students engaged with Athletics through internships, fellowships, and student employment. Serve as a proactive partner — not merely a compliance participant — in academic integrity, learning support, and student success initiatives across campus.
- Partner with Student Affairs to develop and execute student-athlete support systems — including academic advising, life skills programming, and mental health and wellness resources — integrated with university-wide infrastructure rather than siloed within the athletics department.

- Collaborate with NAU's research enterprise and relevant academic units to identify opportunities where athletics can contribute to or elevate the university's research mission, including human performance, sports science, public health, and related fields.
- Work closely with university-wide partners to manage university facility usage in alignment with athletic department needs and institutional academic, research, student success, public engagement, and revenue generating priorities, building a culture of partnership, shared responsibility, and stewardship of university infrastructure.
- Manage complex operations across multimillion-dollar budgets, in close collaboration with the University Budget Office, supporting university-wide priorities around financial stewardship and sustainability. Model effective and efficient practices in scheduling, travel, shared facilities, and operation to steward resources while enabling sustained Division I success and ensuring compliance with NCAA regulations and university policies.
- Partner with Campus Services & Activities to establish, oversee, and grow a university sports camp program that creates meaningful youth and family engagement, generates revenue, and ensures full compliance with NCAA and university policies governing youth programs while also allowing Division I coaches to utilize camps for recruiting purposes. In addition, partner to maximize concession and venue revenues for the university in a manner that is integrated with Athletics department needs and operations, such as student athlete nutrition, on-campus housing, and more.
- Foster a high-performing, values-driven departmental culture, mentoring coaches and staff while thoughtfully evolving the organizational structure to meet the demands of Division I competition.
- Strengthen relationships with student-athletes, coaches, faculty, staff, alumni, donors, community leaders, and university leadership to unify and amplify institutional support for athletics.
- Partner with the Vice President of Advancement | Foundation to raise philanthropic funds in support of athletics, including capital campaigns and endowment priorities.
- Partner with the Strategic Communications on issues management and crisis communication strategies that protect and enhance the reputation of NAU Athletics during times of challenge or change.
- Ensure rigorous, proactive compliance with Title IX across all aspects of athletics operations, and serve as a visible institutional leader in advancing gender equity — modeling and reinforcing NAU's commitment to equitable opportunity for all student-athletes, coaches, and staff.

Qualifications

Minimum Qualifications

- Bachelor's degree in a related area and/or equivalent experience/training
- 8–10 years of progressive experience in intercollegiate or professional athletics administration, including at least 3–5 years in a senior leadership role such as Athletic Director, Deputy AD, or Senior Associate AD
- Demonstrated experience managing complex athletics department operations, including budget oversight, facilities, personnel, and NCAA compliance

- Proven track record of fundraising, donor cultivation, and revenue generation in an athletics or related institutional setting
- Advanced knowledge of NCAA governance, rules compliance, and the philosophies and objectives of Division I athletics programs
- Outstanding leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills with the ability to build consensus among diverse internal and external stakeholders
- Demonstrated experience as a collaborative campus partner — working effectively with colleagues across academic affairs, student affairs, enrollment management, alumni relations and advancement to advance shared institutional goals
- Demonstrated commitment to student-athlete academic success, well-being, and holistic development
- Demonstrated success in managing budgets and fulfilling fiduciary responsibilities with integrity and transparency, in alignment with university priorities
- Ability to travel as required and maintain flexible work hours, including evenings and weekends

Preferred Qualifications

- Advanced degree (Master's or Doctorate) in athletics administration, higher education, business, or a related field
- Experience as a Director/VP of Athletics at an NCAA institution, with demonstrated success building competitive and academically excellent programs
- A track record of recognizing and actively engaging with institutional challenges — including enrollment pressures, resource constraints, student mental health, and community engagement — and bringing the unique assets of an athletics program to bear as part of campus-wide solutions
- Familiarity with the Big Sky Conference landscape, FCS Division I athletics, and the unique opportunities and challenges of that competitive environment
- Proven success leading or significantly contributing to a major capital campaign or comprehensive athletics fundraising initiative
- Experience developing and implementing a NIL strategy that benefits student-athletes while maintaining institutional integrity
- Established relationships with conference leadership, NCAA governance bodies, and the broader intercollegiate athletics community
- Experience working in a public university environment governed by a state board of regents or comparable oversight structure
- A track record of success in media relations, brand development, and elevating an athletics program's regional and national profile
- Experience in or connection to a research university environment, with an appreciation for how athletics can complement and amplify an institution's academic and research identity
- Demonstrated commitment to inclusive, supportive, and high performing athletics programs at all levels of the organization, and capacity to lead and develop staff, coaches, and student athletes to meet their full potential

Application Process

Northern Arizona University invites nominations, applications, and expressions of interest for the position of Vice President and Director of Athletics. The search is being conducted

in partnership with The PICTOR Group. All applications and nominations will be held in strict confidence.

Application materials should include: (1) a letter of interest addressing the candidate's qualifications and vision for NAU Athletics; (2) a current resume or curriculum vitae; and (3) a list of five professional references with contact information. References will not be contacted without prior notification to the candidate.

For full consideration, materials should be submitted by May 22, 2026. The search will remain open until the position is filled, and confidential review of materials will begin immediately upon receipt. Materials should be submitted to

NAUVPSearch@ThePictorGroup.com

For additional information, please contact **Cary Groth**, Founder and CEO at cgroth@thepictorgroup.com.