



## Commissioner Leadership Profile

December 2025



## Executive Summary

The Ohio Valley Conference (OVC) invites applications and nominations for an experienced, externally focused, and dynamic leader to serve as its next Commissioner. Reporting to the Board of Presidents and Chancellors, the Commissioner is charged with providing vision, leadership, and sound decision-making regarding all OVC matters, including aggressive membership expansion and retention, strategic planning, public relations, financial affairs, personnel, and general operations. The Commissioner will be expected to develop measurable goals and metrics to evaluate progress in key areas of focus.

With offices located in Brentwood, TN (near Nashville), the next Commissioner will be expected to provide strategic leadership for the growth and retention of Conference membership, the elevation of the OVC brand, and the support of its member institutions. The Conference, in its 78th year, has an excellent history of competitive success and hosts 19 championships at the NCAA Division I level. In 2026 and 2027, the OVC will partner with the Nashville Sports Council to host the Division I FCS Football Championship games on the campus of Vanderbilt University. Currently serving 11 member institutions, the membership will transition to 9 members in July 2026. Conference members will include: [Eastern Illinois University](#), [Lindenwood University](#), [Morehead State University](#), [Southeast Missouri State University](#), [Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#), [University of Southern Indiana](#), [Tennessee State University](#), [University of Tennessee at Martin](#), and [Western Illinois University](#). Known for its pioneering leadership in gender and racial equity, the Conference continues to seek ways to remain forward-thinking in the dynamic and sometimes turbulent landscape of collegiate athletics.

Supported by a strong internal team, the next Commissioner will bring exemplary skills in recruitment and external relationship building, developing innovative strategies for member expansion and revenue growth. They will serve as a trusted thought-partner and advisor to the Board of Presidents and Chancellors, enabling each member school to contribute meaningfully to the national conversation around intercollegiate athletics. With the support of this open-minded and forward-thinking Board, the Commissioner has the opportunity to make a tremendous impact on the lives of student athletes during their competitive careers and beyond.

The Commissioner will join a hard-working and talented team at a conference with a solid financial foundation. Their challenge will be to take the OVC to greater heights, providing both a branding and growth strategy that ensures its future for generations to come.

The successful candidate must possess an earned bachelor's degree, while an advanced degree (Master's or Doctorate) is strongly preferred. They will be a leader with substantial experience (8-10 years) in collegiate athletics or a comparable field, with progressive leadership responsibilities.

To submit a nomination or express personal interest in this position, please see Procedure for Candidacy at the end of this document.



## Role of the Commissioner

The Commissioner serves as the Chief Executive and Administrative Officer of the Conference with the following key duties and responsibilities:

### Strategic Leadership & Governance

- Providing strategic direction to the Board of Presidents and Chancellors, including the coordination and implementation of both an aggressive strategic plan and a proactive membership recruitment and retention strategy.
- Creating and maintaining a collaborative working relationship with the Conference presidents and chancellors, athletic directors, coaches' groups, senior woman administrators, and faculty athletics representatives, among others.
- Overseeing management and implementation of all membership governance meetings.
- Representing the Conference in applicable national committees and external organizations, including NCAA leadership structures.

### Membership Growth & Conference Development

- Leading aggressive membership recruitment efforts to identify, evaluate, and secure high-quality institutional members that enhance the Conference's competitive profile, geographic footprint, media appeal, and financial stability.
- Conducting comprehensive market analysis to identify potential member institutions that align with the OVC's mission, values, and strategic objectives, including football affiliates seeking relief from high travel costs in other conferences.
- Evaluating and recruiting geographically strategic institutions to strengthen the Conference's competitive position and reduce member travel burdens.

- Developing and implementing retention strategies to ensure current member satisfaction and long-term commitment to the Conference.
- Building and maintaining relationships with presidents, chancellors, and athletic directors at target institutions to position the OVC as the conference of choice.
- Negotiating terms of membership, including entry requirements, revenue sharing models, and transition timelines.



## Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

The Commissioner reports to the Board of Presidents and Chancellors and is charged with providing visionary leadership and sound decision-making regarding all OVC matters, including aggressive membership expansion and retention, strategic planning, public relations, financial affairs, personnel, and general operations. The Commissioner will be expected to develop measurable goals and metrics to evaluate progress in key areas. The goals and measurements will be submitted to the Board of Presidents and Chancellors for approval. In addition, the next Commissioner will have the following opportunities and expectations:

- **Strengthen and Grow the OVC**

With two member schools departing at the end of the 2026 academic year, the next Commissioner must expand membership and improve member retention. They must consider critical factors such as geography, competitiveness, member identity, and resources to develop an effective and expedient expansion strategy.

- **Elevate the OVC Brand**

Using dynamic and externally focused efforts, the OVC's next leader will intentionally elevate the OVC brand, amplifying the compelling narratives of its member schools and highlighting the Conference's strengths. They will be creative not only in promoting the Conference but also in generating revenue through avenues such as media rights and corporate sponsorships. The new Commissioner will also work to advocate internally and externally for strategic and financial investments to bolster competitiveness and increase national exposure across all sports. They will deliver positive ROIs for all sports and member schools. Additionally, the Commissioner will provide insight into the Big South-OVC partnership and its marketing strategy.

- **Serve as a Trusted Advisor to the Board of Presidents and Chancellors**

The current fast-paced environment and fiscal complexity of intercollegiate athletics present new challenges for campus leaders. The next Commissioner must be able to stay on the leading edge of changes and trends in college sports to serve as a trusted advisor and thought partner to the Conference presidents and chancellors. The Commissioner will serve as a point of entry and subject-matter expert, providing not only accurate information but also advice and options for informed decision-making. They will facilitate meaningful discussions among the Board that will lead to well-informed decision-making by the member schools.

- **Provide External Vision**

The Conference office boasts many strengths. One of the greatest is its office staff. Because of these individuals and their skills, the new Commissioner will have the opportunity to develop a stronger external vision and focus and build an external engagement plan that enables them to achieve the preceding expectations.



## Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

At a minimum, the successful candidate must possess an earned bachelor's degree, while an advanced degree (Master's or Doctorate) is strongly preferred. They will be a leader with substantial experience (8-10 years) in collegiate athletics or a comparable field, with progressive leadership responsibilities. The most successful candidates will possess most, if not all, of the following attributes:

- **Experience:** Substantial experience (minimum of 8 - 10 years) within intercollegiate athletics or a comparable field, with progressive leadership responsibility. A pattern of successful leadership and demonstrated management success, preferably within intercollegiate athletics. A proven track record in membership recruitment, conference expansion, or institutional relationship development. A strong understanding of, and vision for the success of, an NCAA Division I athletics environment.
- **Leadership and Interpersonal Skills:** Strong organizational and communication skills and demonstrated ability to work effectively with a wide range of constituents. Exceptional relationship-building skills with the ability to influence and persuade institutional leaders. Strategic thinking with the ability to identify opportunities and position the Conference for long-term growth and sustainability. Demonstrated competence to navigate complex negotiations and build consensus among diverse constituents. High emotional intelligence and capacity to manage change effectively.
- **Business & Financial Acumen:** Strong business acumen with experience in contract negotiation, media rights, sponsorships, and revenue generation. Demonstrated commitment to operational efficiency, cost containment, and value creation for member institutions. Understanding of higher education finance and the economic challenges facing Division I athletic programs. Experience in analyzing organizational structure and implementing cost-effective operational models. Ability to balance financial prudence with competitive excellence and member service. Experience with budget management and financial oversight.
- **Integrity & Compliance:** Demonstrated commitment to supporting the quality of academics and upholding academic integrity. Demonstrated commitment to rules, compliance, and ethical leadership. Unwavering integrity and commitment to the principles of fair play and institutional control.
- **Other Preferred Qualifications:** Experience with conference realignment, membership evaluation, or institutional feasibility studies. Knowledge of FCS football and the competitive landscape of mid-major conferences. Familiarity with emerging trends in college athletics, including NIL, transfer portal management, revenue sharing, and conference consolidation. Experience evaluating and optimizing organizational structure, including office location decisions and remote work implementation. Understanding of geographic market dynamics and their impact on conference operations, member costs, and competitive positioning. Established network within intercollegiate athletics, including relationships with institutional leaders, media partners, and corporate sponsors.





## About the OVC

### Overview

The Ohio Valley Conference was formed by its founding members, Murray State University, Eastern Kentucky University, Western Kentucky University, Morehead State University, Louisville University, and Evansville University, in 1948. The eighth-oldest NCAA Division I Conference, the OVC has a long history of bold pioneerism, breaking racial barriers in the 1950s when Morehead State became one of the first non-traditionally black mid-southern institutions to accept a Black student and then awarded that student athletically related aid. In 1961, its second Black student was a halfback on the football team. Earned all-conference recognition. The rest of the league soon followed Morehead State's footsteps, desegregating their campuses and teams to provide educational and athletic opportunities for Black students.

Similarly, the OVC led the field in providing opportunities for women, establishing women's athletics teams in 1975, following the passage of Title IX legislation in 1972. By 1977, the OVC sponsored championships for women in the sports of basketball, tennis, and track. They added cross-country and volleyball championships within four years and received automatic bids to the NCAA Championships when they assumed the role of the governing body for women's sports.

The OVC sponsors championships in men's and women's basketball, cross country, golf, rifle, soccer, tennis, track and field, men's football (in partnership with the Big South Conference), baseball, women's softball, beach volleyball, and volleyball.

Today, the league comprises 11 full-time members, but it has had 25 full-time members at its peak since it began 78 years ago. Conference members include: Eastern Illinois University, Lindenwood University, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Morehead State University, Southeast Missouri State University, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, University of Southern Indiana, Tennessee State University, Tennessee Technological

University, [University of Tennessee at Martin](#), and [Western Illinois University](#). At the conclusion of the 2026 academic year, Tennessee Technological University and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock will depart to join other conferences. The OVC is home to six affiliate members (Bryant University, Houston Christian University, University of the Incarnate Word, Murray State University, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley).

Learn more about the OVC [here](#).

## Mission and Vision

### Vision

The vision of the Conference is to be nationally competitive while inspiring student-athletes to realize their academic aspirations, maximize their athletic potential, and cultivate their leadership skills to prepare them for life beyond their collegiate experience.

### Mission

The OVC amplifies the missions of its member schools and the execution of their athletic visions. The OVC is comprised of universities with shared values and regional alignment, providing an exemplary Division I collegiate experience for student-athletes.

### Pillars

The OVC's strategic priorities point to three pillars that drove the development of the goals and objectives:

- Inspiring Excellence in the Classroom and Beyond
- Inspiring Athletic Excellence
- Telling Stories of Inspiration and Excellence

### Values

The Conference's six values capture the essence of its members and their commitment to the student-athlete experience:

- **Integrity:** Ensuring that student-athletes, coaches, administrators, and fans treat one another with respect, show a strong commitment to sportsmanship, and act with integrity on and off the playing field.
- **Academic Success:** Upholding the collegiate model by providing student athletes with transformative academic experiences integrated in the greater campus community with the ultimate goal of graduation.
- **Student-Athlete Well-Being:** Striving to provide the necessary resources to help student-athletes be well-balanced, healthy, safe, and reach their human potential.
- **Fiscal Responsibility:** Managing resources responsibly while sustaining viability for the future and striving for growth.
- **Competitive Success:** Providing a competitive environment so student-athletes can be successful at the Division I level while gaining experiences that provide lessons for life.
- **Community:** Playing a special role in communities and striving to ensure that students appreciate the value of being contributing members of society.



## Nashville, Tennessee

Now more than ever, Nashville is on the radar. Named one of the "Best Places to Travel" by Travel + Leisure, one of the "Best Foodie Cities" by U.S. News & World Report and one of the "Friendliest Cities in the U.S." by Condé Nast Traveler, Nashville offers an electrifying multi-genre music scene, award-winning cuisine, historic homes, world-class art, myriad attractions, unique shopping, college and professional sports, and more.

Known as "Music City," the city has long been a vibrant hub for music, a reputation that began to take shape as early as the late 1700s. The city's first settlers celebrated their arrival on the shores of the Cumberland River with fiddle tunes and buck dancing. Nashville's first "celebrity," the frontiersman and Congressman Davy Crockett, was renowned for his colorful stories and his fiddle playing, setting the stage for the city's musical legacy.

Long recognized as the world's capital of country music, Music City is also home to the sounds of pop, rock, gospel, Americana, bluegrass, jazz, classical, and more. With more than 180 live music venues, you can catch music mavens and songwriters all over town, including up and down Lower Broadway's spirited honky tonks.

The talent and imagination of local chefs and artisans have recently put Nashville on the culinary map. Dubbed "The Coolest, Tastiest City in the South" by Bon Appétit, Nashville's creative spirit has infiltrated its kitchens, turning them into chefs' studios. From Southern fare to contemporary cuisine, Nashville's award-winning culinary scene is worth a visit all on its own. The city's famed Nashville Hot Chicken and hearty "meat and threes" are its most notable culinary creations, but Music City has made itself known for a wide range of flavors and innovations from chef-driven restaurants.

Nashville is home to a booming and passionate sports scene, which includes the NFL's Tennessee Titans, NHL's Nashville Predators, MLS's Nashville SC, and Minor League Baseball (AAA) Nashville Sounds.

You can learn more about this vibrant and dynamic city [here](#).



## Procedure for Candidacy

All applications, nominations, and inquiries are invited. Applications should include, as separate documents, a CV or resume and a letter of interest addressing the themes in this profile.

WittKieffer is assisting the OVC in this search. For fullest consideration, candidate materials should be received by January 27, 2026.

Application materials, nominations, and inquiries can be directed to

Jeff Compher and Sandra Chu at:

[OVCCommissioner@wittkieffer.com](mailto:OVCCommissioner@wittkieffer.com)

*The Ohio Valley Conference is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment and is proud to be an equal opportunity employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration without regard to race, color, religion, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, national origin, genetics, disability, age, or veteran status.*