

Self-Advocate Advisory Committee Openings: Virginia Tech Autism Clinic & Center for Autism Research

Who are we?

Drs. Scarpa and Branscome are non-autistic and autistic faculty, respectively, from the Virginia Tech Autism Clinic & Center for Autism Research (VTAC/CAR). The center's mission is to enhance the lives of autistic people through education, services, and research. VTAC/CAR affiliates offer services and conduct multi-disciplinary research related to autism in biomedical, clinical, technology, and/or educational domains, with the goal of informing meaningful treatments or supports.

What is the job?

We are seeking to create a self-advocate advisory committee to advise VTAC/CAR's director on various research, programs, clinical services, marketing, and communications to help ensure that autistic people and their interests are represented in how VTAC/CAR advances its mission on behalf of the autism community. Outcomes of discussions will directly inform potential center research and related services.

Who are we looking for?

We plan to engage a group of up to 7 adults (over 18 years old) who identify as being autistic or having a diagnosis on the autism spectrum. Collaborators must have a high school diploma or equivalent, and be their own legal guardian. We are striving for the committee to be diverse relative to age, gender expression, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, level of support needs, geography, student status, employment status, employment settings, and career stage. We value a variety of perspectives on autism and neurodiversity more broadly. Because VTAC/CAR was founded on scientific and evidence-based practices, ideal collaborators will likewise value the role of scientific practices in autistic people's wellbeing. Collaborators should bring their own knowledge, experience, and perspectives to the table to inform VTAC/CAR's autism services, related programs, and research (including research priorities and design). Our initial committee members will help draft guidelines about committee responsibilities, length of a service term, and the possibility for renewal after each term.

What will collaborators be asked to do?

Collaborators will help ensure that VTAC/CAR's services and research are meaningfully informed by autistic people's perspectives, knowledge, experiences, interests, and needs. Collaborators will be valued advisors and engage in two-way dialogue with VTAC/CAR stakeholders.

To accomplish these goals, collaborators will be asked to:

1. Participate in at least four meetings per year. Other optional meetings may be scheduled, but are not required.
2. Help set committee meeting agendas by identifying discussion topics important to them and other autistic people and also relevant to advancing VTAC/CAR's mission.
3. Review pre-meeting materials and come prepared to provide input, feedback, suggestions, and comments.
4. Be available, if possible, to provide input outside of scheduled meetings, for example via email.
5. Meaningfully interact with VTAC/CAR stakeholders by actively listening to stakeholder perspectives, offering and explaining collaborator feedback, and finding common ground and mutually-informed solutions.

What is the expected time commitment and payment?

At minimum, we expect that collaborators will participate in four Zoom meetings per year (1-2 hours each), for a total required time commitment of 6-8 hours plus time reviewing pre-meeting materials in advance. Sessions will occur between 9:00 AM - 8:00 PM Eastern Time, based on the availability of the members. We also ask collaborators to respond to emails and sometimes provide input outside of scheduled meetings for up to another 10-15 hours. Collaborators will be compensated at a rate of \$150 per year after participating in all four required meetings, with the potential for payment to increase in the future if VTAC/CAR's committee-advised research is funded. Collaborators may also have the option of paid consulting or participation opportunities on other funded research that becomes available.

What are the working conditions?

The meetings will occur synchronously via Zoom. The use of cameras is not required. Members are welcome to communicate via text (e.g., utilizing the chat feature on Zoom), if preferred. A meeting agenda and materials will be provided at least 48 hours prior to the meetings to review in advance. During the meeting, a facilitator will review the meeting agenda and goals before each discussion. Guidelines will be shared before and during the meetings to facilitate a respectful and collaborative environment.

How would a collaborator stand to benefit from involvement?

Collaborators will receive a financial payment (\$150/year) for completed work, per university consultant guidelines. A portion of each meeting may include professional development and education to prepare interested collaborators for future roles with other boards or committees, on topics such as governance, strategic planning, fundraising, etc. Collaborators who wish to be identified may also be listed on the VTAC/CAR website and in the acknowledgements section of any future publications that were directly informed by the committee.

Where can I find more information?

Send questions to the VTAC/CAR Director, Dr. Angela Scarpa at vtautismcenter@vt.edu

How to Apply

Applications will be reviewed as they are received, and we may contact you for an interview, until all positions are filled. If you are interested in applying, **please email Dr. Angela Scarpa and Dr. Caroline Branscome** at vtautismcenter@vt.edu with a brief description (up to 1-page, single-spaced) of the following:

1. Your contact information (name, phone number, email address);
2. Confirmation that you are over 18 years old, identify as being autistic or having a diagnosis on the autism spectrum, have a high school diploma or equivalent, and are your own legal guardian;
3. Why you are interested in being on our advisory committee;
4. Any relevant experience that you have;
5. Any questions you may have about the process.

Resumes or CVs are welcome, but not required. Please include: ***Community Collaborator Application*** in the subject line of the email.

