



Bi-Annual Newsletter

Volume 3, Issue 2
November, 2019

Greetings from the VR-ROI Project team!

The VR-ROI team has been busy over the last several months! We are excited to begin wrapping up loose ends and completing some remaining analyses during this no-cost extension year. After much anticipation, the Special Issue of the Journal of Rehabilitation Administration dedicated to the VR-ROI Project will finally be coming out (See the page 4 for more info). Be sure to read the staff spotlight with Dr. Steven Stern of the research team. You won't want to miss it! We also share the latest in VR-ROI news. We hope you enjoy!

Be sure to follow us on social media for all your latest news in VR-ROI!

Twitter: [@VRROI](https://twitter.com/VRROI)

Facebook: [VR-ROI Project](https://www.facebook.com/VRROIProject)

LinkedIn: [Vocational Rehabilitation Return on Investment \(VR ROI\) Project](https://www.linkedin.com/company/vr-roi-project)



Dr. Joe Ashley and Douglas Zhu, of the Rehabilitation Services Administration, at the Summit on Performance Management in Portland Maine in September.

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Staff Spotlight: Dr. Steven Stern



Dr. Steven Stern is an essential member of the VR-ROI Project research team. After receiving a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics and a Bachelor of Science in Finance, from the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Stern went on to complete his Ph.D. in Economics at Yale University. Since then, he has worked as a professor of economics at several universities, including the University of Virginia, and currently, as a Professor in the Department of Economics at Stony Brook University in New York. Over the years, he has published extensively in the field of economics, on topics pertaining to disability and employment, among many others. He has been an active advocate for people with disabilities for several decades. He wrote a report in the 1980s for the Charlottesville City Council on the “Needs of People with Disabilities in Charlottesville.” While living in Virginia, he served in numerous leadership roles at disability advocacy agencies, eventually becoming president of the organization providing public mental health services in his local community. He believes that this was one of the best things he has done in his life, other than raising his two children with his wife. He enjoys traveling, and his work has offered many opportunities to lecture around the world. Most recently, he has visited Portugal, China, and Maine. He also enjoys watching his son compete in Special Olympics activities. He brags that his son is the best Special Olympics tennis player in New York state and has been invited to two upcoming national tournaments. He also enjoys listening to his daughter sing while playing her guitar, and hopes that she and her wife will give him a grandchild soon. He can be found most evenings relaxing with his wife in their new hot tub, much to the dismay of his son and three dogs.

Dr. Stern became involved with the VR-ROI Project because of Dr. David Dean, the ‘father’ of VR-ROI (featured in the January 2017 VR-ROI newsletter). Dr. Stern states that he was drawn to the project because: “it had amazing data and because the econometrics and modelling questions were really interesting.” See some of his responses to other interview questions below.

How do you see economists and VR professionals working together in the future? What other research would you like to see? *I think this project is a model for how economists and VR professionals should work with each other. We are all interested in what everyone has to say. We are very informal and tease each other a lot. We all learn a lot from each other. For me, one of the most important questions we could analyze is the non-labor market values of VR (e.g., independent living skills). It would be wonderful if we could get policymakers to focus on those benefits as well. This could be accomplished (maybe) by measuring the costs associated with caring for people without independent living skills and showing how improvements in independent living skills could reduce those costs.*

What is one thing (or most important lesson) that you’ve learned from being involved with VR-ROI? *The work we’ve done on taking heterogeneity in services, in characteristics of clients, and across states is a big step in improving the economic literature on modelling and estimating the effects of “treatments.” We’ve basically provided pretty strong evidence that treating the issue as a binary choice (either you get the treatment or you don’t) is a very limiting description of reality and one that performs very poorly in estimating the effect of treatments on outcomes.*



VR-ROI NEWS

- ◇ The entire VR-ROI Project team met at the George Washington University Alexandria campus on September 26 to plan for the grant's no-cost extension year. It was great to all be together in person, since we often only meet by conference call!
- ◇ Dr. Maureen McGuire-Kuletz represented the VR-ROI Project in a presentation at the Virginia Collaborations conference on September 23 in Richmond. The presentation- "Ethics: Return on Investment and the Ethical Use of Data" – was well-received.
- ◇ The VR-ROI Project staff presented at the Summit on Performance Management in Portland, Maine on September 4-6, 2019. Concurrent sessions included: "The VR-ROI Project: Employment Research and Knowledge Translation," and "Five- and Ten-Year Return on Investment Estimates for VR Services in Three States." The Project contributed a poster detailing key information on the VR-ROI Project. There was also a VR-ROI Learning Community meeting and Dr. Kirsten Rowe set a record for being involved in the most presentations!
- ◇ After months of teasing over its release, the Special Issue dedicated to the VR-ROI Project in the Journal of Rehabilitation Administration, is finally being published! Expect to hear more information on the Special Issue's publication date via social media. We hope you all read! Check out a list of the article titles on the last page of this newsletter!
- ◇ The GWU Center for Rehabilitation Counseling Research and Education (employing both Dr. Froehlich and Dr. McGuire-Kuletz) moved to a new location this summer. The new mailing address is: 1925 Ballenger Ave, Suite 250, Alexandria, VA, 22314.

We recommend

If you haven't already, check out Rick Sizemore's podcast: VR Workforce Studio!

He recently interviewed Blue Man Group on their autism-friendly shows, and Vicki Varner, Miss Wheelchair Virginia 2019, right before she competed in the Miss Wheelchair USA Pageant. The podcast episodes can be found at vrworkforcestudio.com or however you listen to your podcasts.



Journal of Rehabilitation Administration Special Issue

Article Titles:

- * Return on Investment for State Vocational Rehabilitation Programs: Introduction to the Special Issue, *Robert Schmidt, Kevin Hollenbeck, Kirsten Rowe*
- * What is ROI? *Kevin Hollenbeck*
- * Social Return on Investment: An Important Consideration for State Vocational Rehabilitation Programs, *Betsy Hopkins*
- * Ethical Issues Encountered in the Use of ROI Estimates, *Robert Froehlich, Olivia Bentley, Diona Emmanuel, Maureen McGuire-Kuletz*
- * Conceptual Issues in Developing Rigorous and Valid ROI Estimates, *John Pepper, Christopher Clapp, Robert Schmidt, Steven Stern*
- * Data Issues in Developing Rigorous and Valid ROI Estimates, *Steven Stern, Christopher Clapp, John Pepper, Robert Schmidt*
- * An Overview of the VR-ROI Project and its Approach to Estimating ROI, *Kirsten Rowe, Joseph Ashley, John Pepper, Robert Schmidt, Steven Stern*
- * Applications of the VR-ROI project: ROI estimates for Virginia and Maryland, *Robert Schmidt, Christopher Clapp, John Pepper, Steven Stern*
- * Extending the VR-ROI Approach to Measure the Return on Virginia's Investment in the Public Workforce System, *Jeffrey Brown, Joseph Ashley*

