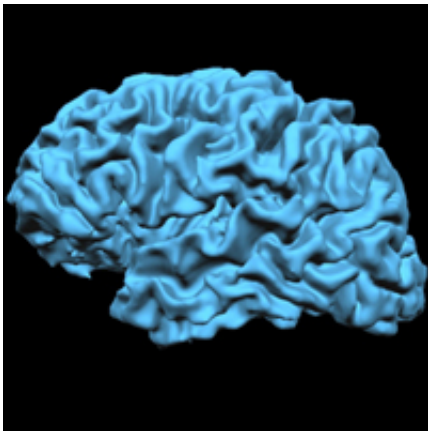


Paul Allen donates additional \$300 million to brain research facility

March 22 2012, by Bob Yirka



MRI brain scan

(Medical Xpress) -- Paul Allen, co-founder of Microsoft, has added an additional \$300 million to the \$200 million he's already given to the brain research facility in Seattle he started back in 2003, the Allen Institute for Brain Science. This new grant is to go towards a new initiative for the Institute, outlined by Christof Koch, chief scientist at the Institute and Harvard neuroscientist R. Clay Reid, (who will be joining the Institute) in a recent comment brief in the science journal *Nature*. The new funding will go towards studying the visual cortex in the brain, starting with mice, and eventually moving to humans.

The Allen Institute for Brain Science takes a unique approach to studying the brain. Instead of supporting several small initiatives, they

instead parcel out pieces of a larger puzzle to various researchers and then continue to all work together to achieve one large overall goal. In many ways, it's similar to the Apollo moon mission. In this case though, the work is privately funded and will be focused exclusively on the visual cortex. The idea is to not just to seek to understand why cells do one thing when a mouse or person looks at something, or how neural pathways are involved, but to understand what is happening in the part of the brain that is critical to interpreting the world, or in other words, to really get at how one of the major parts of the brain works, so that scientists can begin to understand how the brain as a whole works.

Brain researchers readily admit that very little is really understood about how the brain works, despite hundreds of years of research. It's one thing to be able to watch it in action using various tools, to see its different parts cranking away, yet another to understand how it really works or how it provides us with the ability to think and reason, to be who we are; each a uniquely individual person. That's the Institute's overall goal, and it's the reason Allen started the Institute in the first place and why he continues to offer funding.

At a press conference to explain why he's spent over half a billion dollars supporting the Institute, Allen said that he's always been fascinated by the human brain and how it works, something most people can relate to. He said that as a software developer, he's intrigued by the order of magnitude difference in what the brain can do and wants to do what he can to help figure out how the [brain](#) does what it does. It seems to be as simple as that.

More information: Neuroscience: Observatories of the mind, *Nature* 483, 397–398 (22 March 2012) [doi:10.1038/483397a](https://doi.org/10.1038/483397a)

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