

# MIND-Expanding Grants

*New Mexico research institute that studies the brain is following an ambitious plan for self-sufficiency, growth*

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The Mind Research Network has notched remarkable increases in manpower and budget the past two years and is looking to expand its offices to make room for more.

Mind President and CEO John Rasure says the nonprofit has grown from 40 employees in 2006 to 140 today as part of an attempt to reach "critical mass in our research capability."

The organization needs to bring in a certain level of research grant dollars to maintain and continue to improve on its collection of highly sophisticated, sometimes one-of-a-kind imaging and gene analysis devices, especially given that the federal appropriations it once relied on, most of them earmarked by U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-NM, have dried up.

"We have an expensive, high-technology infrastructure," Rasure says. "We need a critical mass of activity to maintain it."

Mind lost an expected \$12 million earmark in 2007, but quickly replaced part of it with a \$7 million competitive grant. Today, Rasure says, the organization relies largely on grant dollars, which went from a total of \$8 million in 2006 to \$11 million in 2007 and will add up to \$17 million this year.

The magic number of employees to bring in sufficient grant money is around 200, which would blow the doors off the organization's current home in Pete and Nancy Domenici Hall, built three years ago on the University of New Mexico's north campus with \$19 million raised largely through Domenici's efforts. The 55,000-square-foot building is shared by Mind and the university, which use its space for a neurological clinic.

Mind's existing 35,000 square feet is occupied by 55 offices, a number of room-filling brain imaging devices and a genetics laboratory. Rasure said plans for expansion are far from settled, but would most likely involve 8,000 to 18,000 additional square feet on the existing site. He said Mind has not yet determined how it will pay for the expansion or how much it will cost.

The grants that are firing Mind's growth are sought by its principle researchers, who, themselves, have doubled in number in the past two years to 15. To earn multiple grants, these researchers have to be imaginative about the different uses for their high-tech equipment. Michael Weisend, for instance, who directs projects related to magnetoencephalography (which observes the patterns in magnetic fields generated by brain activity), works on many different questions about the brain.

"We have a variety of projects," Weisend says, standing over the MEG Core, which looks like a cross between a bonnet hair dryer and a science fiction escape pod. "We do things from normal memory to Alzheimer's and schizophrenia. We're also looking at helping to guide neurosurgical intervention in people with epilepsy and brain tumors."

The Mind Research Network -- which is the proper name of the Albuquerque nonprofit as well as a larger network of brain research institutions of which that nonprofit is a part -- has its largest single research focus in the neurological bases of addiction, taking up a third of its research dollars. Other research areas include psychopathy, which studies the roots of antisocial behavior by scanning the brains of prisoners; schizophrenia, which has seen some of the network's most notable results; neuroinformatics, or the collection and analysis of brain images, which are applied to all the network's research; and positive neuroscience, which studies normal brain processes.

Researcher Julia Stephen focuses on some of the network's smaller research areas, including autism and fetal alcohol syndrome. Her work, dedicated to developing the first-ever methods for confirming these conditions in toddlers using a unique child-sized brain scanner, illustrates the broader impact of Mind's work.



*L) John Rasure, president and CEO of the Mind Research Network, watches while Michael Weisend, Director of the MEG Core, demonstrates how the magnetoencephalography core fits over the head to observe brain functions.*