Episode 29: Dr. Katie Linder Solo #4

**KL:** Katie Linder

**KL:** You’re listening to *Research in Action*: episode twenty-nine.

[intro music]

# Segment 1:

**KL:** Welcome to *Research in Action*, a weekly podcast where you can hear about topics and issues related to research in higher education from experts across a range of disciplines. I’m your host, Dr. Katie Linder, director of research at Oregon State University Ecampus.

Hello *Research in Action* listeners. On this solo episode, I am responding to a listener question that we received via Twitter. And this is from Izaboo*,* who asked, well first of all she stated, “Would love a show on applying for grants when you don’t have an academic appointment.” And then I tweeted with her a little bit and she sent me some more specific questions. She says, “Hi Katie, questions would include the basics: why apply for grants, where to look, benefits or not of collaboration, how to apply.” She also says, “Would love an episode addressing such questions, in particular focused for educational developers who don’t have academic positions but are still research active.” So, I thought all of these were great questions to launch into a solo episode. I can speak a little bit from the educational developer perspective, because that was kind of the previous career that I worked in, and I did grant write during that time. But I also wanted to think about that more broadly, just for people who maybe just aren’t in academic positions, are in more administrative roles, but who want to consider thinking about grant writing, maybe for institutional initiatives or things like that. So, I’m going to keep that in mind as I answer questions.

So, in the first segment I thought I would talk about why apply for grants, and just some grant writing resources that I found to be really helpful. In segment two, I am going to address Izaboo’squestion about where to look and benefits or not of collaboration. And then in segment three, I’ll address a little bit about how to apply and then some other grant writing tips that I have for people who are just starting out.

So, let’s launch into why apply for grants in the first place. I think that grant writing, well I know that grant writing can be a really significant time commitment. So, I think it’s really important to know from the start why you want to write grants and there is a number of reasons why you might want to do this. I think one reason is just it’s either part of your job or you’ve been asked to do it by a supervisor or by a team that you’re working with, and so that may be one reason. The obvious answer is that maybe you need funding to continue with a project or an initiative that you’re working on or to launch one, and that you won’t be able to do it without additional funding. Sometimes I think people apply for grants because they have a project that needs funding so that they can bring multiple stakeholders together and have accountability to move a project forward, and it’s more likely that that would happen if you had grant funding behind it and like a project manager who is being funded from the grant to move something forward. I think that is also pretty common with things like multiple state initiatives and things like that, that you would want to have kind of some grant funding to help that move forward. Some people want the credibility of being grant funded. They feel like it puts some credibility behind the project or the research that they’re working on. And I think another huge reason to consider applying for grants is that you want to develop the skill set of grant writing for your own professional development. And just some of the things that I’ve learned about since I’ve become a grant writer include budgets, institutional processes of managing grants, team building and collaboration, research and designing research for grant writing purposes, assessment and evaluation, project management, writing in a new genre because grant writing is a different genre than article writing or report writing or other things that maybe you’ve done, things like logic models, and project timelines and how you kind of move those things forward. So, those are just a few of the things I’ve learned that kind of came to the top of my head when I was thinking about this. So, I think if you’re wanting to develop yourself just as a grant writer to have it as a professional skill that’s also a great reason to apply for grants. So, I mean I think there’s probably lots of other reasons to want to apply for grants, but I think those are kind of the big ones and clearly the need for funding is a big priority.

So, I also want to share some grant writing resources for people who are just starting out. The first one that I really recommend is a book called *Grant Seeking in Higher Education* by Licklider. And this is a book that I used to use when I was training faculty on grant writing and I would run workshops on grant writing, we would give faculty this book. And it’s a really nice overview of grant writing in higher education. It walks you through different components of the proposal process. It helps you to think about idea generation and how you can kind of take those ideas into something that might be fundable. So, this is one that I definitely recommend. You can find it on Amazon or wherever books are sold. And this is one that I definitely think if you’re seriously considering grant writing definitely at least pick up from the library and take a look at it. This is one of the only resources I found that’s more generalist about grant writing in higher ed.

There are a couple other resources, and I can link to them in the show notes, that are more specifically about grant writing to particular funders. Like I know there’s a grant seeking book for NIH specifically. So, if you have a particular area that you know you’re trying to get funding in, that’s another option is to look and find if there are books that are specifically for that funder or other kinds of resources. One of the other things that I really used to great affect when I started grant writing for education research is a really well done publication that I think is a collaboration from NSF and the Department of Education. And they talk about like what makes good education research and it’s very clear and it’s a really nicely done publication. So, I’ll make sure to link to that in the show notes for people who might be doing more education research.

The other resources that I would really recommend seeking out is talking with people you know who have grant funded projects and just do some informational interviews with them about what their experience was like working on the proposals, what kind of timelines they used, how much of their effort it took. And I think it’s important to talk with people who have actually been funded versus people who are trying to be funded and have not. So, I think it’s important to look to the people who’ve had success and try to figure out what are some of the best practices that they have found that have worked for them. And you could try to look for people that have been funded by a particular funder that you’re looking at or just people at your institution who’ve been successful.

I would also recommend talking with grants administrators at your institution. Some institutions have, there’s usually a central office of people who are helping you to get grant proposals out the door. They need to provide all kinds of assurances to funders before you can submit anything. And they’re really trained to help you find grants, to navigate the grant writing and submission process, to do all of the logistics of paperwork for before, during, and after you receive your grant funding. And these are people that are, I mean they have their own organizations, I’ve gone to a couple of the conferences for my own professional development. One is SRA International and there’s also NORDP I think, which is also for people who are grant developers. So, I’ll link to those resources in the show notes as well.

There are also conferences by specific funders that can be incredibly helpful. So, NSF has regional and national conferences where they go into extreme detail about how to write proposals for them. They are not keeping secrets from us. I mean they want us to be able to write successful proposals that will be funded. So, I’ve been to a regional conference and have found it to be incredibly effective in terms of just walking people through the process and how to engage with the website. Oftentimes they have their program officers also presenting at these conferences about specific areas that you can receive funding in. I haven’t gone to other conferences other than the NSF one, so I’m not super aware of kind of what else is out there, but I will try to link to some things in the show notes if I can find anything. But if your funder does have a conference or some kind of event, I would definitely recommend going and trying to make a personal connection with some of the people there so you can ask direct questions.

I also wanted to point out a couple other grant writing resources that are coming up on the *Research in Action* podcast. We have an episode in October on applying for and managing large research grants, so that’s coming up. And we also have an episode in November on broader impacts and that’s a category that many funders are asking proposal writers to address. So, we’re also trying to get at some of these questions with our podcast episodes because we know that many of our researchers are also grant writers.

So, those are kind of the resources that I would recommend. I also think that people who are successfully writing grants are pretty open to sharing what works for them. I have also had good success with asking other grant writers for sample proposals if I wasn’t sure how to organize or like what the funder was looking for in terms of structure, and that’s also been super helpful to me. So, that’s another resource, that if you’re further along in terms of drafting your proposal you might want to look into as well.

I’m going to take a brief break. When I come back I’ll talk a little bit about where you can look for grants and also some benefits of collaboration. Back in a moment.

[music]

# Segment 2:

**KL:** In the first segment I talked a little bit about why to apply for grants and some grant writing resources that I can recommend. In this segment, I’m going to talk a little bit about where to look for potential funding opportunities and also the benefits of collaboration on grant proposals.

So, where to look? So, the answer to this is maybe not what you want to hear, which is, of course, it depends. It depends on what you’re trying to fund. But there are a few larger categories of places you might want to look. One is regional foundations. And this is something, when I was in the Boston area we had a couple different grants that were funded by the Davis Educational Foundation, and they were a regional funder that was just in the New England area. And so you may have, depending on where you live, certain regional funders who are just looking to fund things that are for institutions in your geographical area. So, that’s something to keep an eye out for. There are also national foundations. For example, recently we applied for some funding that was kind of a sub-award through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. And so that’s another possibility is to look for funding from, you know, Lumina or some of the larger foundations. There’s also federal grants. This is things like NSF, NIH, NEH, IES, the Department of Education, all these different kinds of areas have funding mechanisms. So, you can look to those. And then another one that we’ve looked into here, and we’ve actually funded some research through, is corporations and industry partnerships. Right now we have a collaborative research project going on with 3Play Media that’s helping us to study how students use and perceive closed captions in their classroom experiences as college students. So, there may be other kind of broader categories other than that. Those are the main ones that I have engaged with. And I think that, you know, when you’re just starting out, you may want to look and see if your institution has a grant database where you can search by funder and topic. This is where I started out when I was first grant writing. Now I feel like I have a more specific idea of the funders I want to watch for and like when they release their calls and what their timelines are. And so I’ve focused in on those specific ones. But I wasn’t really able to do that until I got a good landscape and tried to figure out, you know, what were the main areas that I was going to be looking for in terms of funding.

The other thing that you can do is talk with other researchers, faculty, or administrators to get their ideas of who could fund you. And this is something, so, for example, a recent project we were working on here, we were going to be doing some work with various collections on campus here at Oregon State, and I asked for help from our librarians because I thought they may know of some funding opportunities from library organizations. And that’s an area that I’m really not familiar with. And so I reached out to someone and they gave me a couple of ideas of websites to look on and I could look at their timelines and see when their funding calls were coming out. So, that’s another possibility. It’s just kind of let people know what you’re thinking about if you have an idea in mind that you’re trying to fund and see if they have ideas for you.

I think kind of the most important thing about where to look for grants is don’t be afraid to ask questions. Lots of people don’t know what they’re doing when it comes to grant writing and funding. And I don’t mean that in any kind of derogatory way. I just mean it in that when we are all starting out, we’re novices and it’s ok to ask questions. And people are, you know, at your grants administration office or your colleagues, they’re here to help you. So, I think it’s important just to feel comfortable asking those questions. And even if you’ve been funded before, you may have to learn all new information when you switch to a new project or new funder. Because, you know, like a regional foundation, when I applied to that regional foundation, for example, all I had to do to submit my application was email them. Well, that’s really different than what I have to do when I apply to a grant for a federal agency, for IES, which is one that I recently did. And it required all kind of knowledge about grants.gov and it was my first time applying through grants.gov. So, I was asking a lot of questions about, you know, how do I learn about sub-awards and how do I know I’m putting the right information where it needs to go and I’m not leaving anything out so it gets kicked back to me. And, you know, I was really asking a ton of questions of our grants administration office. So, I think it’s really ok to admit that you don’t know everything and that you might need some assistance.

So, in terms of where to look, if you’re just starting out I would just say see if you have a grant database that you’ve registered with on your campus. If not, you can also look around on specific websites for funders. I would maybe start at the federal level and then work to find out if there’s anything in your region. National foundations are often doing very specific invitations and may not have open calls, but that’s another place you could look as well.

So, I’m going to shift now to talking about the benefits of collaboration. And I loved how Izaboo says, “the benefits or not of collaboration” in her question about this. I think that collaboration in grant writing is huge right now because a lot of the funders are asking for answers to big questions that can’t be answered by one researcher alone. And this is something that we’ve actually tackled I think on some of our other *Research in Action* episodes where we’ve talked about things like interdisciplinary research and how we need lots of things coming together to really answer those big questions. So, grants are similar and you really need a lot of people coming to get there, to even get an application out the door. So, just to give you a sense: my last two grant applications that were kind of larger applications – each of them were for more than half a million dollars – they had over twenty-five different contributors each at the proposal stage. So, those were people who helped me get things like institutional information for our sub-award partners, they were giving me budget information, I had to get bio statements from the co-investigators, there were people helping me find OSU-related information regarding facilities and campus resources, and there were just a bunch of other details that were all needed to make sure that our, you know, fifteen to twenty page narrative statements were correct and that they were detailed and we were providing the information that the funder needed to know. I could not have done those applications without those collaborators. I think it would have been almost impossible and I certainly wouldn’t have met the deadlines without having a really team-based approach to doing those larger applications. And I pulled in anyone, I mean anyone and everyone. It was people in our grants administration office, it was people in our business center to help me with the budgets, my co-investigators, we had organizations writing letters of support, so I was working with contacts from there. So, you know, I think that collaboration whether or not you’re actually doing collaboration like as part of the research, you will have to have some level of collaboration and teamwork just to get the proposal out the door. So, I think that’s a really important thing to note.

I think it’s also important to realize that even though you will have collaborators, it’s helpful to have a leader or champion for the proposal that’s putting all of the details together. And for these last two proposals that I just talked about, I was that person. I was kind of the central point person to really make sure that we had everything we needed and all of our, as we say here at Oregon State, “all of our Beavers were in a row.” Without that person, I think things can really fall through the cracks. And maybe you can even miss important information that you needed to include in your application. When you have too many cooks in the kitchen, it can get pretty disorganized. So, that’s something, it may be you or you may be a contributor to someone else who’s leading a proposal, but I think it’s actually really helpful when you assign, you know, who that person is. And also make sure they have the time and resources to do what they need. So, in the case of these two proposals, because everybody knew I was the point person, they knew that if I asked for something, they really needed to help me and they needed to get it to me in the deadline or we wouldn’t be able to meet the proposal deadline that we had in front of us.

That said, while collaboration completely necessary in my opinion, is not always easy. And this is something that we refer to in episode six when I talked with Kirsten Behling about collaborations and we talk a little bit about how to set up a good collaboration from the start and how to make sure that you’re sort of checking in with people, having good communication, what do you do when collaborations go awry. So, all of those things, if you’re interested in learning more about that, I would definitely recommend our episode six of *Research in Action*.

The other thing that I think is really important to consider in terms of grant collaborations is that if you’re not a faculty member or you do not have a PhD, depending on the funder, you may need to find a collaborator to work as a PI for credibility with that funder. And this is something I actually ran into once when I was working with someone who was a PI who only had a Master’s degree. And it was actually commented on by the reviewers. That they felt like it was, they questioned whether or not that person could conduct the research. And while I believed that they could, it is something that gets questioned on applications. So, just something to consider depending on what your role is on your campus. I was on a campus once where I frequently collaborated with other faculty as an administrator to make sure we had that credibility with funders. So, something else to keep in mind.

I’m going to take another brief break. When I come back we’ll talk a little bit about how to apply for grants and other grant writing tips that might be helpful to you. Back in a moment.

[music]

# Segment 3:

**KL:** So, in the first two segments of this episode I’ve talked a little bit about why to apply for grants, some grant writing resources that might be helpful to you, where to look for grants, and the benefits of collaborating on grants and some things to look out for with that. In this third segment, I’m going to talk a little bit about addressing Izaboo’s question about how to apply and then just offer some other grant writing tips that I’ve learned over my past several years of grant writing.

So, for the how to apply, this is another question that it depends on the funder. Some funders require just an email submission and so you would just kind of prepare the documentation and literally just submit it via an email. Just making sure that you’re getting a confirmation that they’re received it. I’ve had other funders that require an email submission and they also required a mail submission. And so we just had to make sure that the hard copy mail submission was getting in under the deadline. You will get kicked back for many funders if you do not hit their deadline. And that’s very unfortunate if you’ve spent a lot of time on a grant and then you miss the deadline and it’s just wasted time and you can’t do anything with that application other than find another potential funder.

For other funders, you have, and this is an example with federal grants, they require you to go through grants.gov, which has what looks like, at least at first glance, pretty complicated paperwork. The nice thing is in that system they will tell you if you’re missing information. It will throw like error messages at you and it also helps you to kind of auto-fill different things. Like if you fill it in in one section, it will fill it in in another section. And that was one, I recently submitted something through there and I went through and just made sure I familiarized myself with the system and I felt very confident about where things were going. It also helps to have a really good idea, particularly with that system of grants.gov, of what your budget is and to really know in and out the details down to the penny, especially if you’re working with sub-awards and you need letters of commitment from those institutions. Their budget has to match your budget, has to match the budget that you put into grants.gov and if you make any last minute changes, all of that now needs to be adjusted and moved around. So, it’s really important I think to know, you know, down to really the small details of like what is your indirect rate and all of those different kinds of things that get calculated into the little details of your budget. It really does matter when you get down to the how to apply and you’re starting to work with the paperwork.

One of the most important things to know, especially for people who are newer to grant writing, is that however you submit, you’ll want to get approval from your grants office first. They will go over all of your paperwork, they’ll check your budget. They need to offer certain kinds of assurances depending on the funder that you’re working with. And so from an institutional perspective, they look at your proposal and make sure that they can basically sort of certify that you’re going to be able to do the work that you’re saying that you’re going to do. So, it’s very important and I learned this really early on as a grant writer to notify your grants office as soon as possible that you’re going to be going for a grant. They’re usually juggling multiple applications and proposals at the same time and so it’s really helpful for them to know if you have a deadline that’s going to be on the same day as, you know, five other proposals that are going in. And, you know, we just learned this year at Oregon State, we had another record breaking year for the amount of research funding that we brought in. So, our grants office is popping all the time and their time is very valuable and precious. So, I really like to let them know as soon as remotely possible that we’ve got something and we’re going to be, you know, here’s the timeline. We do use a system on our system called Cayuse that allows us to electronically route proposals and get them signed off by the appropriate people. Your campus or institution may have something similar, and so you’ll want to look and see if that’s something that you need to kind of learn about. You may even need to be added into a system, like if you’re not already somebody who’s grant writing, you may need to talk with them to get added into the system before you can move forward. So, that’s another kind of important thing. So, how to apply. Every funder is going to be clear with you about how to do that. They’re going to be very clear on the deadlines and on the process as well, so you’ll just want to make sure you look out for that information and when you’re working on your proposal.

The last thing I wanted to chat about in this episode was some other grant writing tips. I cannot emphasize enough to read what the funder is asking for and then when you’re drafting your proposal to continue to read again what the funder is asking for. I think that even if you outline your proposal using the call from the funder, sometimes we just go astray or maybe we’re not including the information they asked for. And so I typically read the proposal, write a draft, and then I will read, or sorry, I’ll read the call, I’ll write a draft, and then I’ll read the call again and just make sure I have everything. Several pages, you know, these calls can be several pages, they can be very dense and confusing, so giving them the time that they deserve in terms of just reading through, you know, these multiple pages to make sure you really understand whether you’re a fit.

Sometimes the grant that I apply to have like multiple goals and different things under those goals that you’re applying for. And it’s not always clear which goal is the best fit. So I would also recommend if you’re applying, especially for a federal grant, to schedule a time with a program officer to chat with them via phone or to send them your proposal over email. And I would send first just a one-page kind of summary of your proposal and ask if they’re willing to look at it and give you some feedback and talk with you about it. If it’s an option, connecting with your program officer is a wonderful resource that federal grants offer. And these are people that really want to help you to create the strongest proposal that you can. So, I’ve had really good experiences working with program officers.

And then also, as I mentioned earlier, consider attending a conference for a particular funder. NSF was the example that I gave. I’ll try to track down if others have these as well, but it was really helpful to hear directly from program officers and people who are former reviewers who can talk about what is it they’re really looking for when they’re trying to fund different things.

It’s also really important to make sure you know the deadline for your grant and that you plan backwards from there for what you need to do. And consider that, you know, a grant, it takes a significant amount of time. I would say it is easily equivalent to a peer-reviewed article draft. So, if that’s something you’ve done before, you should block off a significant amount of your time, your schedule, and your brain space, especially if your application is a larger one with lots of moving pieces, sub-awards, collaborators. It’s, you know, you’re going to be managing that project from day one of kind of working on that proposal. So, for me the most recent one that I did and it was, we asked for a little over eight hundred thousand dollars for a research grant from a Department of Education funder. I, pretty much the entire month before that was due, the majority of my time was spent on various components of that grant. I wouldn’t say that I was full-time working on it, but I was the primary writer on it and I was kind of corralling everyone and getting the information, so it was a significant amount of my time from kind of early July to the deadline, which was August 4th. So, I definitely think you should take it seriously and also start writing the proposal as soon as remotely possible. Waiting until the last minute, I think we procrastinate with grant writing out of fear. And the sooner you can get words done on a page and start thinking about how you want to pursue this particular funding opportunity, I think the more easily it’s going to be to revise things later on. And also to share it with partners.

And that’s the last thing I would recommend. Is to get partners and collaborators involved early because they’re certainly going to have pieces that they need to provide for you, whether it be a bio sketch or, you know, information about their institution and how they’re institution is going to be part of the research you’re doing or the initiative that you’re trying to fund. And, you know, trying to get partners at the last minute to email you things when you’re under a deadline, even if you have the most kind, conscientious partners, you know, it’s always better to just get on people’s radar early. And to put in time buffers so you’re not feeling stressed about getting proposals in.

So, Izaboo, I hope that this was helpful to you. I hope it answers some of your questions about grant writing basics. I’m happy to hear additional questions from listeners all the time. Please feel free to contact us on Twitter @RIA\_podcast or you can always email me at riapodcast@oregonstate.edu to let us know about the questions you’d like us to cover here on *Research in Action*.

Thanks for joining me this week on the podcast. I’m Katie Linder and we’ll be back next week with a new episode.

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