

Request for Proposals

Cultural Influences in Regulatory Capture

The Social Science Research Council's (SSRC) Scholarly Borderlands Initiative, in collaboration with the Tobin Project, seeks graduate student grant proposals that focus on how cultural factors may contribute to "regulatory capture" in the United States. This project aims to facilitate new research investigating interactions between private industry representatives and government regulators outside of the formal procedures outlined by administrative law. Successful applicants will receive funding toward the completion of short-term, ethnographic research on "regulatory-adjacent spaces" or other promising projects that address how cultural influences may alter regulatory outcomes. The resulting research will investigate possible pathways of undue influence, as well as consider implications for efforts to prevent regulatory capture.

RESEARCH SCOPE

Regulatory capture takes place when regulations are "consistently or repeatedly directed away from the public interest and towards the interests of the regulated industry, by the intent and action of the industry itself." Capture need not occur through campaign contributions, so-called "revolving doors" of agency personnel, or lobbying on technical issues by regulated industries; it may also occur through subtler means that regulators may not even be conscious of. Interpersonal factors such as shared social networks or group identities may enable industries to "culturally capture" regulators, masking divergences between the interests of the public and those of particular industries.

In order to identify the mechanisms of undue industry influence, it is important to evaluate both the formal and informal situations in which policymakers and those they are charged with regulating interact. These conversations occur in official meetings and regulatory hearings, but also quite plausibly in other settings such as plenary sessions, meals, and coffee breaks at industry-sponsored events. Understanding the kinds of interactions that occur in these 'regulatory adjacent spaces'—such as industry association meetings, policy conferences, continuing education workshops, and job fairs—and the mechanisms by which they may lead to particular policies may help grow understanding of the role of cultural influences in regulatory capture.

TO APPLY

To apply, please send a proposal of no more than five pages along with your curriculum vitae to scholarlyborderlands@ssrc.org. Proposals should include a project timeline identifying the specific event(s) at which you intend to conduct fieldwork, a proposed plan of action for interfacing with other attendees, specific research questions to be explored over the course of your research, and a preliminary budget. Applications that demonstrate deep background knowledge about the industry of focus and relevant regulatory topics that may be addressed at the site of research are most likely to be successful. Creative proposals that address the issue of cultural capture outside the scope of observable "regulatory-adjacent spaces" will also be considered.

Applications are welcomed from students of any discipline in the social sciences studying at the graduate level. Students who are members of groups traditionally underrepresented in the social sciences are particularly encouraged to apply.

Grant recipients will receive funding for the cost of expenses such as reasonable conference attendance fees, coach-class travel, and accommodations during the specified research activities, conditional on receiving Institutional Review Board approval from the recipient's home institution. Recipients will also receive a stipend of \$300 after submitting their preliminary findings to the SSRC and the Tobin Project. Depending on the number of applications received, projects may be funded in whole or in part. At this time, only US-based researchers and projects can be accommodated.

For any questions about the project or application process, please contact scholarlyborderlands@ssrc.org. Potential applicants are encouraged to reach out with questions as they prepare their applications.

Deadline January 18, 2019