

NERC

NORTH AMERICAN ELECTRIC
RELIABILITY CORPORATION

ALIGN

Regional Entity Newsletter

November 2021

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LET'S GET ALIGNED: KEY TAKEAWAYS

Release 3 Update

The next release of Align is ready for production! The project team completed acceptance testing and regression testing in October. The release was deployed to the Align training environment in early November, and the team is currently preparing the deployment checklist for the move to Align production. Release 3 functionality will consist of core capabilities for audits, audit planning, and scheduling.

SCHEDULED MAINTENANCE AND UPGRADE OUTAGE FOR ALIGN PRODUCTION

The project team will be promoting Release 3 code upgrades to the Align production environments during a three-day window from December 7–9, 2021. This upgrade requires a planned outage; however, **the planned outage DOES NOT include the ERO Enterprise Secure Evidence Locker (ERO SEL) or the ERO Portal**. The ERO SEL and the ERO Portal will remain available during the outage window. Notification of the outage is posted on the [Align project page](#) on NERC.com and will also be announced via the Align software login screen. Please contact your regional change agent with any questions concerning the outage. The contact information is available on [page 5](#).

The regional adoption schedules and training plans for Release 3 are in development and will be announced in December. Stay tuned for further information on this via the [Align project page](#) and the January Align Newsletter.

Release 4 in Progress

The Align project team commenced development of Release 4 on November 1. As announced at the August 2021 NERC Board of Trustees meeting, the Align project team added Release 4 to the project schedule for 2022. The ERO Enterprise remains committed to the effectiveness of the compliance monitoring and enforcement program (CMEP) and invested in the Align and SEL tools to improve the security, automation/efficiency, and harmonization/consistency of CMEP activities. Release 4 will encompass functionality originally scheduled for Release 3: inherent risk assessments (IRAs), compliance oversight planning (COP), and enhancements to audits, audit planning, and scheduling.

The main reason for the bifurcation is taken from the lessons learned with Release 1 and Release 2: take deliberate steps and break the effort into pieces to ensure each release is properly implemented. An example of this approach was the phased rollout of Release 1 by Region and the phased rollout of Release 2 by function.

As the project team worked with ERO Enterprise Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to identify the specific requirements around functionality for IRAs, COPs, and audits, it became clear that these processes, which were never automated nor harmonized, would be too large for a single release. The ERO Enterprise uses 18 separate tools to complete this work today—from webCDMS and CITs to SharePoint, FTP sites, and Microsoft Office tools. Given the importance of these processes to the effectiveness of the CMEP, the project team decided to focus on providing core

functionality for audits, audit planning, and audit scheduling in Release 3, deferring the functionality for IRAs, COPs, and enhanced audit capabilities until a new Release 4 in Q3 2022. A specific go-live date for Release 4 will be announced after Release 3 is adopted.

Standards Data on NERC.com Now Exportable

One of the main goals of the Align project was to make standards data more readily available to Regions and registered entities. Now that all standards information is maintained in Align, progress on this goal reached another milestone with the completion of standards reporting data now available on NERC.com via an export from Align. The standards matrix was previously only available in PDF form; now, the full matrix is exportable to Excel and is consumable by Regions' and registered entities' data systems if desired. The Violation Risk Factor (VRF) and Violation Severity Level (VSL) reports are now combined into one and are exportable. Please see the [updated page on NERC.com](#) for the new reports.

Align Governance Model Kickoff

The Align Governance Model (AGM) kicked off in September with the first meeting of the Align User Group (AUG). The group also met on November 3 to discuss the backlog list of requested functionality.

The purpose of the AGM is to recognize the impact of the Align and ERO SEL tools on the entirety of the CMEP program. The model will do this by fostering collaboration across the ERO Enterprise about Align tool functionality, expenditures, and business value and providing close integration with existing CMEP committees. The model will be the mechanism to determine Align tool functionality once operational. The model also addresses interaction and input with registered entities.

The governance model will be transitioning into place over the next several months as Align Releases 3 and 4 are completed. The Align Product Management Team, another component of the AGM, is finalizing its plans and processes, and will be coordinating with the AUG in the coming months. More details about the Align Governance Model and its participants can be found on the Align project page [here](#).

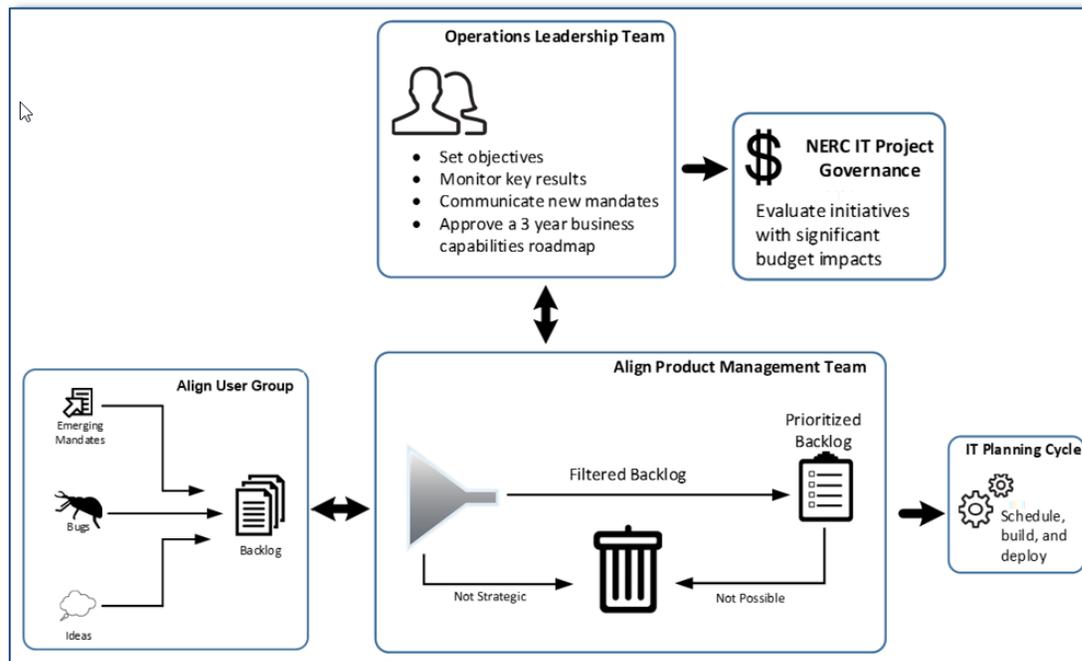


Figure 1.1: Align Governance Model

Canadian Jurisdictions' Use of Align

The Align project team is working with those Regions that support Canadian regulators (i.e., MRO, NPCC, and WECC) to create project plans and activities in support of using Align. These activities include determining high-level requirements by province, importing provincial standards data into Align, and defining the appropriate user roles.

Currently, Ontario is live with Align as of Release 1 in May 2021. The implementation plan for Canadian provinces is below, but is subject to change as requirements and data elements are finalized:

- Manitoba & Saskatchewan (MRO) – Q2 2022
- Alberta & British Columbia (WECC) – Q2 2022
- Nova Scotia (NPCC) – Q4 2022

Accessing Align

An important part of the project's success is ensuring appropriate access to the system. An active ERO Portal Account is required to access Align and the ERO SEL. **Please follow the instructions below to verify an existing account or set up a new account and note that it takes 48 hours for a new account to be activated.** For password resets, select the "Forgot Password/Username" to reset a password. For questions or problems concerning ERO Portal accounts, please submit a support ticket [here](#).

All registered entities' primary compliance contacts (PCCs) should also have an ERO Portal Account and be set up as Align Registered Entity Submitters and the Entity Administrators responsible for approving access requests. Users approved by the PCCs are automatically given an ERO SEL submitter role. Additional access to the ERO SEL outside of Align access must be handled with a support ticket.

Refer to the [Registered Entity User Access Guide](#) for detailed instructions.

To Set Up an ERO Portal Account:

1. Navigate to <https://eroportal.nerc.net>.
2. Select "Register" in the upper left-hand corner.
3. Complete the registration form and click "Submit."

To Verify an ERO Portal Account:

1. Navigate to <https://eroportal.nerc.net>.
2. Select “Sign In” in the upper left-hand corner.
3. Enter your credentials to confirm access to ERO Portal.

Quick Links for Reference

Here is a list of links to commonly requested project materials for Align and the ERO SEL. Please reach out to your Change Agents for additional materials.

Quick Links
FAQs
Align Governance Model (Updated April 2021)
Registered Entity SEL Requirements (Updated February 2021)
NERC Training Site
Release 1 CEA User Guide
CEA SEL User Guide
Release 2 CEA User Guide
Registered Entity User Access Guide
Data Handling Guide to Align and ERO SEL
Align Business Case

Want to Learn More? Key Contacts and Resources

Please submit questions to AskAlign@NERC.net or reach out to your Regional Change Agent. The change agents meet monthly and have the latest project updates. They are another resource for asking questions or sharing comments and feedback on the project.

Align Change Agents	
Organization	Change Agents
MRO	Desiree Sawyer , Marissa Falco
NERC	Chris Boyd-Witherspoon , Jamie Calderon , Farzaneh Tafreshi , Sara Minges
NPCC	Jason Wang , Kimberly Griffith
RF	Anthony Jablonski
SERC	Andrew Williamson , Janice Carney , Melinda Montgomery , Rick Dodd , Todd Curl

Texas RE	Rochelle Brown
WECC	Angie Shapiro , Ben Aldous , Mailee Cook

Release 2 Training Contacts	
Region	Training Leads
MRO	Desiree Sawyer ; Jeremy Mattke ; Rob Quinlan
NPCC	Daniel Kidney ; Duong Le ; Kimberly Griffith
ReliabilityFirst	Bob Folt ; Bob Yates ; George Spila ; Anthony Jablonski ; Ron Ross
SERC	Alex Shestopal ; Derek Lepresti ; Janice Carney ; Rafael Lerdo ; Rick Dodd ; Shawna Speer
Texas RE	Ben Gregson ; Dennis Glass ; Devin Kitchens ; Eric Newnam ; Rochelle Brown
WECC	Aldo Nevarez ; Angie Shapiro ; Duane Cooke ; Jessica King ; Tyler Whiting

ABOUT THE ALIGN NEWSLETTER

This newsletter compiles a list of important Align project updates with actionable deadlines, as well as upcoming events, recently posted resources, and other relevant news and information. Please email AskAlign@nerc.net with feedback on this newsletter. Current and future newsletters and additional project resources, including the regularly updated [Align FAQs](#), can be found on the [Align Project Site](#).