Business Process Improvements

Q: How much consistency has been created as a result of the work on the Align project?

A: The Align project has created an opportunity for the ERO Enterprise to provide a consistent user experience for all regions and registered entities. The project team conducted process harmonization workshops with representation from each region, looking at all the CMEP business processes, identifying common ground and efficiency opportunities. As of Release 1, there were more than 30 process improvements identified for efficiency and commonality in the end-user experience.

Q: Will the Rules of Procedures change as a result of process harmonization?

A: The business process improvements identified for Release 1 provided an opportunity to identify potential updates to the Rules of Procedures. These updates were provided to NERC Legal for consideration. Not all of these changes would require changes to Align, but to the extent they do, and they are submitted to and approved by FERC, the Align software will be enhanced, and regions will be notified and trained on the updates. Release 1 will be launched with the functionality to support the Rules of Procedures as they exist today.

Q: Will self-Logging be impacted/accommodated in new system?

A: Yes, self-logging functionality will be in Release 1 of Align. Rather than entering data into a spreadsheet and sending it to the region, Registered Entities will enter self-logs directly into the Align system.

Q: Should we hold off on reporting new violations until the new system is available?

A: Entities should continue to report new violations in the current systems. The project team will make a decision regarding migration of those violations into Align closer to the launch date.

Q: Will entities be able to manage individual employee access without contacting NERC or their Region?

A: Yes, the ERO Enterprise has moved to a distributed administration model, where one or more "entity administrators" will manage access for that registered entity's users via the ERO Portal. This is the same access management platform we use for the majority of our latest ERO Applications (such as TEAMS, and MIDAS) and Extranet sites. Registered Entities will also use this system to manage access to the new CORES registration system.

Stakeholder Engagement

Q: Did NERC get input with regard to the entity experience before building the system?

A: Yes, NERC is engaged with the CCC's Alignment Working Group to get feedback on what their experience will be. They have been shown screenshots of the system, and will also be able to provide feedback during user acceptance testing.

Technology

Q: What is multifactor authentication (MFA) and how will it work?

A: Multi-factor Authentication (MFA) is a method by which a user is required to present more than one factor in order to log into the system. When a user logs into the system they will be required to provide a password and then the system will send a notification to either a user's phone or email address. Once a user acknowledges the notification, they will be logged into the system.

When a user logs into the system they will be required to provide a password (what you know) and then the system will send a notification to either a user's phone or email address (what you have). Once a user acknowledges the notification, they will be logged into the system.

Q: Where will Align be hosted?

A: The Align solution will be running on NERC-dedicated private (single-tenant) servers, on hardware hosted by a fedRAMP-certified cloud services provider (CSP).

Q: Will there be an API to extract entity's data so entities can generate their own trends?

A: The Align tool has robust reporting capabilities that allow for users to export information from reports to perform external analysis. While we do not plan to give registered entities the ability to invoke API methods directly, we are exploring how to give registered entities the ability to create their own reports using their own data in the future. Prior to giving a user this capability, registered entities will need to take a training course on how to use the built-in reporting functions of the Align system. We will announce more about these features and others as the Align tool continues to mature.

Legacy Systems (webCDMS, CITS and CRATS)

Q: Will the Align tool replace the current systems (webCDMS, CITS and CRATS)?

A: Yes, the Align tool will replace these systems once all the planned releases are completed. This is planned for 2020. The business case for the project is based on sunsetting these legacy systems to reduce the costs for the ERO Enterprise from supporting three systems (webCDMS, CITS and CRATS) to supporting one platform (Align).

Q: What will happen to the historical data?

A: The current plan for historical data is two-fold: migrate relevant historical data from the legacy systems into Align for analytical purposes, and provide an "archive" of other data that can be referenced in the future. The details are still being developed.

Q: When will CITS/CDMS be retired, and no longer used for accessing historical data?

A: Accessing historical data via the legacy systems is still in discussion. There is no date yet, but systems most likely will be up and available until sometime in 2020. Discussions are happening with the vendors of these systems (OATI and Guidance) to provide support for this transition.

Ongoing Support

Q: Who will provide technical support for the new tool once the project is completed?

A: The Align tool will be supported by NERC IT and the BWise support team. NERC has signed a multi-year maintenance and support agreement with BWise to ensure system availability and uptime, and to maintain the environment with up-to-date patches and security updates. The NERC IT team will support the regions with requested enhancements, defect resolution, and future releases.

Training

Q: Will I need to train my registered entities for Day 1?

A: Yes, registered entities should be trained to use the system on Day 1. The plan is to migrate the appropriate data and cutover from legacy systems to the Align tool on Day 1, and not use the legacy systems for Release 1 functions from that point forward. The project team is providing the training materials for the regions to use to train their registered entities, and those trainings have been scheduled.

Q: If training starts in August, but the launch isn't until September, will users be training in a demo environment or the real environment?

A: NERC will conduct training in separate training environment that will simulate the production environment. The training system will have the same core functionality as the production system.

Change Management and Business Readiness

Q: What criteria will be used to determine whether or not the system is ready to go live in Q3?

A: Quality is foremost in the minds of the project team, and there are several pieces in place to ensure that; namely, ongoing build reviews during construction, a "tabletop" exercise with the regional SMEs to simulate the Day 1 experience, and "go/no-go" criteria that focuses on the registered entity experience, regional experience, and NERC (in that order). When making the decision to launch, the team will prioritize consideration of any impacts on registered entity staff first; then the impacts on Regional Entity staff; and last, the impact on NERC staff.