

# FERC's Criteria for Approving Reliability Standards (from Order 672)

## Commission Conclusion

320. We find informative the recommendations of commenters on criteria for reviewing a proposed Reliability Standard, particularly on how to apply the legal standard of review, "just, reasonable, not unduly discriminatory or preferential, and in the public interest." Although we will not adopt every test that commenters propose, we do provide here general guidance regarding how the Commission will review a proposed Reliability Standard.

321. The proposed Reliability Standard must address a reliability concern that falls within the requirements of section 215 of the FPA. That is, it must provide for the reliable operation of Bulk-Power System facilities. It may not extend beyond reliable operation of such facilities or apply to other facilities. Such facilities include all those necessary for operating an interconnected electric energy transmission network, or any portion of that network, including control systems. The proposed Reliability Standard may apply to any design of planned additions or modifications of such facilities that is necessary to provide for reliable operation. It may also apply to Cybersecurity protection.

322. The proposed Reliability Standard may impose a requirement on any user, owner, or operator of such facilities, but not on others.

323. In considering whether a proposed Reliability Standard is just and reasonable, we will consider the following general factors, as well as other factors that are appropriate for the particular Reliability Standard proposed.

324. The proposed Reliability Standard must be designed to achieve a specified reliability goal and must contain a technically sound means to achieve this goal.

Although any person may propose a topic for a Reliability Standard to the ERO, in the ERO's process, the specific proposed Reliability Standard should be developed initially by persons within the electric power industry and community with a high level of technical expertise and be based on sound technical and engineering criteria. It should be based on actual data and lessons learned from past operating incidents, where appropriate. The process for ERO approval of a proposed Reliability Standard should be fair and open to all interested persons.

325. The proposed Reliability Standard should be clear and unambiguous regarding what is required and who is required to comply. Users, owners, and operators of the Bulk-Power System must know what they are required to do to maintain reliability.

326. The possible consequences, including range of possible penalties, for violating a proposed Reliability Standard should be clear and understandable by those who must comply.

327. There should be a clear criterion or measure of whether an entity is in compliance with a proposed Reliability Standard. It should contain or be accompanied by an objective measure of compliance so that it can be enforced and so that enforcement can be applied in a consistent and non-preferential manner.

328. The proposed Reliability Standard does not necessarily have to reflect the optimal method, or “best practice,” for achieving its reliability goal without regard to implementation cost or historical regional infrastructure design. It should, however, achieve its reliability goal effectively and efficiently.

329. The proposed Reliability Standard must not simply reflect a compromise in the ERO’s Reliability Standard development process based on the least effective North American practice—the so-called “lowest common denominator”—if such practice does not adequately protect Bulk-Power System reliability. Although the Commission will give due weight to the technical expertise of the ERO, we will not hesitate to remand a proposed Reliability Standard if we are convinced it is not adequate to protect reliability.

330. A proposed Reliability Standard may take into account the size of the entity that must comply with the Reliability Standard and the cost to those entities of implementing the proposed Reliability Standard. However, the ERO should not propose a “lowest common denominator” Reliability Standard that would achieve less than excellence in operating system reliability solely to protect against reasonable expenses for supporting this vital national infrastructure. For example, a small owner or operator of the Bulk Power-System must bear the cost of complying with each Reliability Standard that applies to it.

331. A proposed Reliability Standard should be designed to apply throughout the interconnected North American Bulk-Power System, to the maximum extent this is achievable with a single Reliability Standard. The proposed Reliability Standard should not be based on a single geographic or regional model but should take into account geographic variations in grid characteristics, terrain, weather, and other such factors; it should also take into account regional variations in the organizational and corporate structures of transmission owners and operators, variations in generation fuel type and ownership patterns, and regional variations in market design if these affect the proposed Reliability Standard.

332. As directed by section 215 of the FPA, the Commission itself will give special attention to the effect of a proposed Reliability Standard on competition. The ERO should attempt to develop a proposed Reliability Standard that has no undue negative effect on competition. Among other possible considerations, a proposed Reliability Standard should not unreasonably restrict available transmission capability on the Bulk-Power System beyond any restriction necessary for reliability and should not limit use of the Bulk- Power System in an unduly preferential manner. It should not create an undue advantage for one competitor over another.

333. In considering whether a proposed Reliability Standard is just and reasonable, the Commission will consider also the timetable for implementation of the new requirements, including how the proposal balances any urgency in the need to implement it against the reasonableness of the time allowed for those who must comply to develop the necessary procedures, software, facilities, staffing or other relevant capability.

334. Further, in considering whether a proposed Reliability Standard meets the legal standard of review, we will entertain comments about whether the ERO implemented its Commission-approved Reliability Standard development process for the development of the particular proposed Reliability Standard in a proper manner, especially whether the process was open and fair. However, we caution that we will not be sympathetic to arguments by interested parties that choose, for whatever reason, not to participate in the ERO's Reliability Standard development process if it is conducted in good faith in accordance with the procedures approved by the Commission.

335. Finally, we understand that at times development of a proposed Reliability Standard may require that a particular reliability goal must be balanced against other vital public interests, such as environmental, social and other goals. We expect the ERO to explain any such balancing in its application for approval of a proposed Reliability Standard.

336. In addition to the factors above, in considering a Reliability Standard originally developed by a Regional Entity for application only within its own region, the Commission will consider other appropriate factors in determining if the proposed Reliability Standard is just and reasonable, not unduly discriminatory or preferential, and in the public interest. These include, but are not necessarily limited to, whether a regional difference is necessary or appropriate to maintain reliability and whether such a regional difference would affect reliable operation in another region. The ERO should also examine such factors in its consideration of such a regional proposal.

337. In applying the legal standard to review of a proposed Reliability Standard, the Commission will consider the general factors above. The ERO should explain in its application for approval of a proposed Reliability Standard how well the proposal meets these factors and explain how the Reliability Standard balances conflicting factors, if any. The Commission may consider any other factors it deems appropriate for determining if the proposed Reliability Standard is just and reasonable, not unduly discriminatory or preferential, and in the public interest. The ERO applicant may, if it chooses, propose other such general factors in its ERO application and may propose additional specific factors for consideration with a particular proposed Reliability Standard.

338. We reject the notion that we should presume that a proposed Reliability Standard developed through an ANSI-certified process automatically satisfies the statutory standard of review. In this regard, we agree with EEI and others that the development of a Reliability Standard through the ERO's stakeholder process is no guarantee that a proposed Reliability Standard does not have a discriminatory impact or negative effect on competition even if the proposal meets its technical or operational objective.

## Version History

Version	Date	Owner	Change Tracking
1	May 16, 2014	Standards Information Staff	Updated template
1	August 28, 2023	Standards Information Staff	Updated template