NERC System Operator Certification Program
February 11, 2019

Background

The intent of this whitepaper is to communicate proposed changes to NERC's System Operator Certification program as governed by NERC's Personnel Certification Governance Committee (PCGC).

The PCGC is proposing to change the current System Operator Certification from its current four credentials listed below to one credential, "NERC Certified System Operator."

- Reliability Coordinator (RC)

- Balancing and Interchange Operator (BI)

- Transmission Operator (TO)

- Balancing, Interchange and Transmission Operator (BT)

The PCGC recognizes this will require a Standard Authorization Request (SAR) to revise PER-003 (Operating Personnel Credentials).

Summary

As the governing body, the PCGC feels that having one credential better serves reliability of the Bulk Electric System by ensuring all System Operators are tested to the same level of minimum knowledge and skills. This will help to eliminate knowledge silos within the System Operator community.

In concert with the move away from four credentials with differing Continuing Education Hours (CEH), the number of CEHs to renew a certification for the one credential will be set at 140 hours, 30 hours of Standards, and 30 hours of Simulation.

Problem Statement

As part of the PCGC's Strategic Plan, the current state of both the System Operator Certification Program and the Continuing Education Program was reviewed. This review revealed that despite the development of the four credentials, there has been a natural gravitation towards the Reliability Coordinator (RC) credential.

Even though over 72 percent of the "Active" NERC Certified System Operators currently maintain the RC credential, this is not representative of the number of actual RCs and was never the intent of the Certification program. This high percentage of RC credentials is in part attributable to the perception that the RC credential is of a higher level than the other three credentials. The RC credential only reflects the minimum level of knowledge and skill attributable to RCs, as compared to BI, TO, or BT operators. The requirements of PER-003 that state that an RC credential is acceptable to perform the duties of all

positions that require a NERC System Operator Certification furthers this misconception. As a result, System Operators have naturally gravitated toward the RC credential because of its portability.

In addition, as part of the exam development cycle, the Exam Working Group performs a Job Analysis. This Job Analysis is a research study conducted in order to identify the following:

- Tasks and work activities

- Context in which those tasks and activities are carried out

- Competencies (knowledge areas, skills, and abilities) required to effectively perform a job role

At one time, the result of the Job Analysis of System Operators identified distinct knowledge and skill that supported maintaining four, separate credentials. Recent reviews and exam format iterations show that over time, the same knowledge set is appropriate and necessary for inclusion in all four examinations.

Solution
Given the learnings identified above, the PCGC is generating this whitepaper to transition the System Operator Certification Program back to one System Operator credential.

As part of this change, the PCGC is proposing the number of CEHs required to recertify a credential be set at 140 hours while maintaining 30 hours of Standards, and 30 hours of Simulation.

Transition Plan
Consistent with the NERC Reliability Standard revision process, the PCGC will support a NERC Standard Authorization Request (SAR) that will propose a revision to PER-003.

Six months after applicable regulatory approvals of the revised PER-003, NERC will administer one System Operator credential exam, and all Active credentials will be transitioned to the new single credential. At this time, the only proposed changes to the program are one credential and the required CEHs to maintain this credential.