



## **The Importance of GISCI Certification to State Government**

For Presentation at the  
National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC)  
Annual Conference  
Little Rock, Arkansas  
October 1-5, 2006

[www.gisci.org](http://www.gisci.org)



The GIS Certification Institute

1460 Renaissance Drive, Suite 305

Park Ridge, Illinois 60068-1348

(847) 824-7768

Fax (847) 824-6363

info@gisci.org

www.gisci.org

As the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) field has grown increasingly complex and diversified, the need to ensure that a standard of achievement is met has become increasingly important to employers, clients, and everyone that works in the GIS field. To meet that need, the GIS Certification Institute (GISCI) was created to provide states such as your own with the ability to ensure that your employees and external contractors are proficient in GIS technologies and practices.

The certification process to which the GISCI adheres is based on an individual's experience, contributions to the GIS profession, and education. The three-part certification process is designed to make certain that an applicant has a strong baseline understanding of the fundamentals and operations of geographic information system techniques and analyses before becoming a certified GIS Professional (GISP).

GISCI estimates that 65% of its GISPs are from the public sector. States however, are under represented, consisting of only 5-10% of public sector GISPs. Through word of mouth and indirect marketing, municipal and county employees are flocking to become certified as GIS Professionals. This information packet will provide the background information you need to better understand the benefits of GIS professional certification to your state government.

***The second purpose of this letter is to request that your organization join the others that have endorsed the GISCI certification program.*** As you consider your agency's endorsement, you may wish to review the other contents of this package:

- Brief overview of the GISCI certification program
- 7 Reasons why GISCI Certification is Important to State Government fact sheet
- Sample endorsement letter from North Carolina
- Geographical breakdown of GISPs
- Testimonials from GISPs
- "What is GISCI?" brochure

I encourage you to visit our website at [www.gisci.org](http://www.gisci.org) where you will find a listing of all GISPs in your state. Further, all GISPs are authorized to give a brief "What is GISCI Certification" presentation at the local level. For additional copies of this report or for more information, contact our Executive Director, Scott Grams ([sgrams@gisci.org](mailto:sgrams@gisci.org)). Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Lynda Wayne, GISP  
President, GISCI



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## **7** Reasons Why GISCI Certification is Important to State Governments

### **1** GIS is no longer internal

Most states share GIS data with other public agencies, not-for-profit associations, private companies, and individual citizens. These stakeholders represent many dollars, votes, along with public credibility. GISCI ensures that certified professionals are performing the work that strengthens these crucial relationships. Employing GISPs reinforces the idea that these relationships are important and worth preserving.

### **2** States cannot do it all

Projects are often outsourced to the private sector. There is risk associated with having an outside agency represent your interests. If something goes wrong, it may not be the consultant who takes the heat. GISCI assures that the contracted body has employees who have met minimum standards for education and experience. No longer do you have to take the firm's word for it. Let the GISP credential do the talking.

### **3** States lead by example

The ultimate goal of certification is to improve the GIS profession. When states endorse the program, they set an example for counties, municipalities, and other public agencies that utilizing GIS professionals is an important business practice. The trickle down effect is important to improving state GIS work across the board. It is no coincidence that GISCI has a large percentage of GISPs from the states that have endorsed the program.

### **4** Knowing who to trust

When a consultant blows into town with a miracle solution, can you trust them? GISCI holds its GISPs to higher ethical guidelines through its Code of Ethics, and ethics charges may be filed against a GISP. A state that knows whom to trust before their coffers are opened is how citizens grow to trust their government.



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## **5 Thinning the resume stack**

Given that the public sector is one of the largest employment sectors using GIS technology today, the state's taxpayers deserve assurance that ethical and competent GIS professionals are being hired with their public tax dollars. Certification is one of the means governments – and all employers – can use to identify the most qualified individuals for GIS positions.

## **6 Doing it right the first time**

GISCI certification is not a panacea. It does not mean that every project a GIS professional touches will turn to gold. It does guarantee that the GIS practitioner in question did not wrongly hang a shingle above their door claiming proficiency. They have had their background investigated by an independent third-party organization. This backing, coupled with your staff's own experiences and assessment, should help to locate professionals who insist on getting things done right the first time.

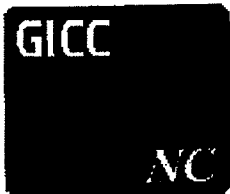
## **7 GISCI is the only game in town**

GISCI offers the only certification program for GIS professionals. The American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ASPRS) has a Mapping Scientist GIS/LIS certification that is different in scope and approach. The ASPRS program includes GIS as part of a suite of geospatial technologies and general competencies. Some of which fall outside the knowledge base of typical GIS practitioners.

The Institute joined together with other geospatial technology organizations to ensure that certification would be broad-based and uniformly applied. GISCI is an independent organization concerned only with certification. Industry organizations supporting the GISCI include:

- ❖ The Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA)
- ❖ The Association of American Geographers (AAG)
- ❖ The National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC)
- ❖ The University Consortium of Geographic Information Science (UCGIS)

Finally, the GISCI has been endorsed by the States of North Carolina and Oregon. If you find that the GISCI certification offered by GISCI provides a significant benefit to your state, you are encouraged to join this growing list by offering the endorsement of your state as well.



**North Carolina  
Geographic Information Coordinating Council**

20322 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-0322  
919.733.2090

October 1, 2004

**Chair**

Dempsey Benton

Mr. Scott A. Grams  
GIS Certification Institute  
1460 Renaissance Drive, Suite 305  
Park Ridge, IL 60068

**Staff**

Center for Geographic  
Information & Analysis

Dear Mr. Grams:

**Committees**

Management and Operations  
Statewide Mapping Advisory  
GIS Technical Advisory  
State Government GIS Users  
Local Government Committee  
Federal Interagency Committee

The North Carolina Geographic Information Coordinating Council (GICC) would like to take this opportunity to commend the GIS Certification Institute for establishing the GIS Certification Program. The GICC endorses this program and believes that it represents a significant step forward in recognizing the contribution of GIS professionals to their organizations, their communities, and the profession. This program deserves publicity and promotion to raise awareness and support for its goals.

The GICC would like to make two suggestions to the Institute and its board of directors as you continue to build the program.

1. A privacy statement would be helpful that would serve to protect the privacy of personal information that is part of an applicant's documentation (e.g., social security numbers).
2. Strive to keep the application fee at a reasonable level going forward as a way to encourage worthy applicants to seek and retain certification.

Thank you for your valuable work and support of the GIS profession through the GIS Certification Program. The GICC intends to promote the program to all GIS professionals in North Carolina.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dempsey Benton".

Dempsey Benton  
Chair, Geographic Information Coordinating Council  
Chief Deputy Secretary, Department of Environment and Natural Resources

DB:tj

## GISCI State-by-State Breakdown (as of August 25, 2006)

GISCI began operations on January 1, 2004. Since that date it has certified 1,268 certified GIS professionals (GISPs). GISPs work in every state and 14 foreign countries. Below is the breakdown.

State	Number of GISPs	State	Number of GISPs
Alabama	9	Montana	2
Alaska	5	Nebraska	9
Arizona	27	Nevada	13
Arkansas	1	New Hampshire	3
California	68	New Jersey	18
Colorado	38	New Mexico	11
Connecticut	10	New York	23
Delaware	1	North Carolina	104
Florida	132	North Dakota	1
Georgia	58	Ohio	57
Hawaii	6	Oklahoma	8
Idaho	18	Oregon	52
Illinois	24	Pennsylvania	36
Indiana	30	Rhode Island	3
Iowa	8	South Carolina	18
Kansas	6	South Dakota	5
Kentucky	17	Tennessee	22
Louisiana	10	Texas	66
Maine	6	Utah	8
Maryland	25	Vermont	3
Massachusetts	25	Virginia	53
Michigan	38	Washington	34
Minnesota	14	West Virginia	3
Mississippi	5	Wisconsin	31
Missouri	14	Wyoming	3
		District of Columbia	6
<b>International</b>			
Canada	61		
Argentina	2		
United Kingdom	2		
Australia	1		
Bahamas	1		
Germany	1		
Indonesia	1		
Jamaica	1		
Japan	1		
Republic of Korea	1		
Romania	1		
Singapore	1		
United Arab Emirates	1		
Zimbabwe	1		



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## **Everything You Need to Know about GISCI Certification**

### **The Need for Professional Certification Programs**

Certification programs are a result of the dramatic shifts in the workplace that have occurred over the past three decades. The mobilization of the workforce as well as the constant need for continuing education and training have created a demand for these programs. Certification is a voluntary endorsement of an individual's expertise by a third party. Licensure, on the other hand, is a process by which a governmental authority grants permission to an individual practitioner to operate or engage in an occupation or profession. The GISCI endorsement identifies professionals' strengths much more than a university degree or specialized training. Certification should be an accurate assessment of all the elements that make up a professional regardless of the individual's title, specific responsibilities or geographic location.

### **The Difference Between Certification and Licensure**

The main difference between being certified and being licensed is the regulatory process. Licensed professionals are strictly regulated in the practice of their occupations by a local, state or federal government agency or licensing board. Engineers, surveyors and medical practitioners are just a few examples. At the present time, there is no licensing program available to GIS professionals in the United States, so prospective employers and the general public have no definitive means of judging an individual's qualifications for the performance of GIS services. The GISCI certification program requires pre-determined levels of education and practical experience similar to the requirements of most licensing programs. Just like the professional license, the GISCI certification is evidence that the recipient has met the highest available standards of professional competency and integrity.

### **The Need for GIS Certification**

The GIS community has a responsibility to ensure a consistent high level of quality in the field. GIS is a functional tool for many professionals in other disciplines but there is a core group of professionals who are advancing the profession using a specific set of skills. Certification provides a means for attaining recognition by one's colleagues and peers that the GIS professional has demonstrated professional competence and integrity in the field. It will encourage long-term professional development that will help existing professionals maintain currency in GIS technology and methods. Professional certification will assist prospective employers in the assessment and hiring of GIS professionals. Lastly, it will assist aspiring GIS professionals in choosing their educational and professional opportunities wisely.

### **The Function of the GIS Certification Institute (GISCI)**

GISCI is the third-party organization that was created to manage GIS professional certification. The establishment of a separate certification entity is common practice in credentialing. GISCI was created to help certification become more multilateral. Since GISCI began operations in January of 2004, four associations have joined as Member Organizations. The Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA), the Association of American Geographers (AAG), National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC), and the University Consortium of Geographic Science (UCGIS) all appoint representatives to the GISCI Board of Directors. All revenue generated by certification goes to fund the Institute. As GISCI continues to flourish it would like to include other GIS sister organizations at the leadership level to ensure that the broad interests of the GIS community are being addressed.



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### The GISCI Certification Program

It is important to note that the GISCI program is a portfolio-based system and does not require an examination. Portfolio-based systems are not uncommon in professional certification. The GISCI portfolio system ensures that its methods accurately capture and endorse the skills necessary for GIS practice. GISCI demands competency in three areas of GIS:

1. Educational achievement
2. Professional experience
3. Contributions to the profession

The minimum number of total points needed to become a certified GIS Professional is 150 points. Thus, all applicants are expected to document achievements valued at a minimum of 150 points accrued to these three areas of proficiency. To ensure that applicants have a broad foundation, specific minimums in each of the three achievement categories must be met or exceeded. These minimums are as follows:

Education: 30 Points

Experience: 60 Points

Contributions: 8 Points

The additional 52 points can be counted from any of the three categories. The applicant has complete flexibility in deciding how to make up this difference. In other words, the 52 points can be made up from any combination of points from any one (or more) of the categories.

### Educational Achievement Points

Education points are earned in three different categories:

**Credential Points:** points earned through successful completion of a formal degree or certificate program offered by accredited educational institutions. The bulk of an applicant's education points come from the highest credential earned.

**Course Points:** points earned through successful completion of individual courses, workshops, and other formal, documented educational activities whose subject matter relates directly to geographic information technologies. The awarded points are based on the number of contact hours therefore; A three-credit, semester-long university course is worth more points than an eight-hour workshop.

**Conference Attendance Points:** Conference attendance points are awarded in recognition of the valuable informal learning afforded by participation in meetings and conferences sponsored by professional societies and regional and local user groups. Applicants receive 0.1 points per day spent at a conference. These points are especially important for recertification, and potential applicants should retain documentation that provides evidence that they were at a conference.

### Professional Experience Points

Job experience is the most important factor contributing to an individual's qualifications as it allows opportunities to become skilled at the application of GIS technology to real world





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problems. Failures and successes in these contexts provide valuable learning experiences that, in turn, allow growth and expansion of skill sets. In addition, the professional working environment, where one is often working with other GIS professionals who have different skill sets and different experiences, provides opportunities to gain knowledge from one's peers.

The Professional Experience section will list all the jobs and professional responsibilities that the applicant had or currently has. The applicant should list the duration title, duration of employment, and the percentage of time spent working in GIS. Different positions offer different levels of points. For example, more credit is given for GIS analysis and design experience than for data compilation or teaching.

Experience points are earned in three categories depending on what level of GIS work was being completed. Points may be scattered across two or all three categories. For instance, if a candidate spent half of his time programming and the other half training others on using a GIS, he would receive half credit in both point categories. There is also a separate bonus point section for supervisory experience. If the applicant supervises GIS professionals, she will earn additional experience points for each year in a supervisory role. Professional profiles, a resume, and a signed letter from the applicant's current employer or client need to accompany the portfolio.

#### **Contributions to the Profession Points**

Contributions to the Profession points document activities that add to the professional body of knowledge for the benefit of the profession as a whole and not just the employer and client. Contributions points can be earned in dozens of different areas from publishing a book to presenting a paper to organizing a GIS Day activity. Proper documentation must accompany the portfolio so that claims may be verified. The applicant must earn Contribution Points outside of their job requirements. If the employer requires the activity, it may not be claimed as a contribution point.

#### **Code of Ethics**

The second component of the GISCI program was the development of a GIS Code of Ethics. All GIS Professionals, regardless of whether they apply for certification should try to follow the guidelines listed in the Code. The Code of Ethics helps GIS professionals make appropriate and ethical choices. It provides a basis for evaluating their work from an ethical point of view. By heeding this code, GIS professionals help to preserve and enhance public trust in the discipline. No successful applicant will be certified by GISCI without signing the Code.

#### **The Portfolio Review Process**

Once the portfolio is completed and returned to GISCI headquarters the review process commences. The Review Process is broken into two parts. The GISCI staff provides a quantitative review and the GISCI Review Team provides a qualitative review. The staff review consists of ensuring that all the documentation has been provided and the point claims were equated correctly. The Review Committee consists of certified GIS Professionals who are trained on how to review the contents of a portfolio. They determine if the point claims are accurate and reflect the spirit and guidelines of the certification program. Review Committee



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decisions on points and point adjustments are final. Both the GISCI Staff and Review Committee will operate under strict confidentiality guidelines.

#### **Staying Relevant Through Recertification**

In order for GISCI Certification to remain current and relevant, a recertification requirement was added to the program. Recertification is a necessary component of the Program in order for the credential to have meaning and ensure its holder's competency. Every five years an applicant will be expected to submit a shortened portfolio that will place a heavier emphasis on professional experience and contributions to the profession. The education requirements will be relaxed considering not many applicants will have the chance to return to school for formal educational opportunities. When the applicant successfully recertifies it will be valid for another five years.



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## Testimonials from Certified Geographic Information Systems Professionals (GISPs)

*Where was this GIS Professional designation when I was in school? From the GISCI, I have had the opportunity to not only review and archive the accomplishments of my career, but be encouraged to be an active participant in the industry's future. The recognition for hard work, presentations, coursework, as well as work experience is all positive and offer's a healthy model for future generations of geospatial professionals. Finally, the GIS Professional designation is another point that the evolving technology of this industry is in fact proven and here to stay.*

**Brian Sovik, GISP**  
Tempe, AZ

*My GISP certification is important to me because it validates my many years of work in the field of GIS. It proves - to myself and to others - that I have a broad understanding of the industry and can provide expertise to a variety of disciplines. I also enjoy being part of the larger community of GIS professionals.*

*Because of my GISP certification, I am becoming better known within my firm as a GIS expert, and that has brought me additional recognition and work. I have seen proposals that specifically mention my experience and my GISP accreditation. I credit my GISP certification with helping to bring in at least one new client already! Further, I feel like my co-workers look to me as a leader in GIS and an expert in the field. It is most certainly a valuable addition to my resume.*

**Hilary E. H. Perkins, GISP**  
St. Louis, MO

*The GISP reminds me that I have a duty to continue to contribute to the profession in an ethical manner because I signed the Code of Ethics. I have an obligation and commitment to my employer, my colleagues and individuals in society.*

**Justin Cure, GISP**  
Longview, TX

*As part of the establishment of URISA's GISCorps program, we give special consideration to volunteers who are GISP's when we allocate projects to them. We have also made it a requirement that each GISCorps volunteer, whether GISP or not, signs the GIS Code of Ethics. Advocating for rigorous adherence to the GIS Code of Ethics is also a priority in my daily practice with GIS and non GIS staff both in Alachua County and the students and colleagues at the University of Florida.*

**Juna Goda Papajorgji, GISP**  
Gainesville, FL



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*As a GIS professional in the civil engineering field, I work side-by-side with engineers and surveyors, whose practices are strictly governed by State licensing boards. Achieving my GISP certification has solidified my own credentials in the same manner, and provided me with a core level of legitimacy and standing that I do not feel I could have accomplished otherwise. My firm has acknowledged my GISP certification by posting a press release on our corporate website. My GISP status also figures prominently in any competitive bidding strategies for digital mapping and GIS work.*

*I would like to see GIS nationally recognized as a distinct profession in its own right, worthy of its own separate set of standards and practices, and not merely as a tool incorporated into many other diverse professions. Just as the professional licensing boards oversee and manage the engineering and surveying professions, I believe the GISCI can play a pivotal role in establishing and maintaining the groundwork for every aspect of the GIS profession. Those who routinely use GIS technology in the performance of their work are those best qualified to establish its future. As a GISP, I am very proud to be among them.*

**Kevin R. Zelinsky, GISP**  
Haddonfield, New Jersey

*Certification is acceptability and recognition, among my responsibilities are constant meetings with Engineers (PEs), Photogrammetrist (CPs) and Licensed surveyors to discuss various project's demands. GISP has earned me a place in the midst of these experts; my mapping ideas are now given a more serious thought. I'm proud to be associated with GISCI and GIS. We are the ambassadors of this noble profession and its future depends on US.*

**Paul Ogino, GISP**  
Hampton, GA