



# USGIF Accreditation from Start to Finish

A Program Overview, Benefits, and Steps Required to Gain this Gold-Standard Program Accreditation

## About USGIF

The United States Geospatial Intelligence Foundation (USGIF) was founded as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational foundation in 2004. USGIF's purpose is to promote the geospatial intelligence tradecraft and to develop a stronger GEOINT Community with government, industry, academia, professional organizations, and individuals who develop and apply geospatial intelligence to address national security challenges. USGIF achieves its mission through various programs and events and by building the community, advancing the tradecraft, and accelerating innovation. Within our education and professional development programs, we pursue the following types of activities:

- Publishing and distributing educational materials relevant to civic associations, governmental bodies, libraries, schools, universities, and other interested groups;
- Sponsoring and supporting educational programs including, but not limited to accreditation of GEOINT programs of study and organizing programs and events for teachers, administrators, and students; and
- Awarding scholarships to students at institutions of higher education to pursue geospatial intelligence disciplines.

## What is USGIF accreditation?

Demand for qualified geospatial intelligence (GEOINT) personnel has been outpacing the supply of a qualified workforce for many years. To meet this growing demand, USGIF maintains the Collegiate Geospatial Intelligence Accreditation Program, assuring students entering the field

have the modern skills and education in geospatial disciplines that provide a strong foundation for a GEOINT career.

USGIF established the accreditation program in 2005 to encourage higher education institutions to develop academic curricula that prepare students to support and advance the geospatial intelligence field. USGIF accredits both GEOINT certificate programs and GEOINT degrees.

The USGIF Collegiate Geospatial Intelligence Accreditation Program serves three major purposes:

1. To recognize GEOINT programs that meet or exceed standards and criteria for educational quality;
2. To provide GEOINT academic standards (USGIF's GEOINT Essential Body of Knowledge); and;
3. To assist accredited programs in further improving their GEOINT curricula to keep pace with a changing GEOINT professional environment

### Why Seek USGIF Accreditation?

USGIF's accreditation program is the gold standard for geospatial intelligence learning. Mission-driven and community-informed, USGIF's accreditation process engages representatives across government, industry, and academia, ensuring the core competencies required for students to succeed in the geospatial intelligence field are met at the highest caliber.

Accredited programs are an integral piece of the GEOINT community. Faculty and students alike contribute research, knowledge, and insights to USGIF's ongoing programming, to government and industry, and to the geospatial community at large.

The benefits of USGIF accreditation are widespread and have value to:

#### Your Program

USGIF accreditation enhances visibility. Faculty members gain a new community of peers through USGIF's network of accredited schools and can connect with fellow educators and researchers. Likewise, the achievement of accreditation is highly valued by other non-academic members of the GEOINT community. USGIF engages faculty of accredited programs to inform updates to the Essential Body of Knowledge (EBK), provide guidance on academia's needs, and assist in reviewing other programs seeking accreditation. Accreditation also supplies programs with benefits from USGIF's numerous Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with industry, nonprofit, and government partners, including access to software and workshops.

#### Students

For students, USGIF accreditation means they are enrolled in a program recognized by premier professional organizations and employers. The certification provides students with a thorough

and rigorous GEOINT-focused education. To employers, graduates from these programs are highly qualified, and are already on a path to becoming a successful GEOINT professional.

#### Your Institution

To accredited schools' administration, accreditation signals that the program is committed to continuously evolving and providing students with a variety of demanding and innovative courses. USGIF accreditation is a golden stamp that marks the institution's programmatic values and quality. The visibility of the institution and its ties to the geospatial and intelligence communities is also heightened.

#### The GEOINT Profession

Program accreditation signifies commitment to help further define and expand what GEOINT means. USGIF partners in government and industry trust that our Essential Body of Knowledge reflects the needs and standards of the GEOINT profession and acknowledge USGIF as the leader in accreditation.

### Who is Accreditation for?

#### Eligibility

The following are the initial eligibility criteria for institutions seeking accreditation:

- The institution providing the program is accredited by a third-party agency.
- The program seeking accreditation is rooted in geospatial intelligence, geospatial, geography, or a similar field of study.
- The program is either an undergraduate, masters, or PhD program in one of the aforementioned fields of study.
- The program seeking accreditation has departmental and institutional support.
- The program's mission is consistent with USGIF's aim to facilitate the growth and innovation of GEOINT.
- The total number of credit hours required to complete undergraduate certificate programs is at least 18 total credit hours (15 credit hours and a minimum 3 Capstone credit hours). The total number of credit hours required to complete graduate certificate programs is at least 15 total credit hours (12 credit hours and a minimum 3 Capstone credit hours). USGIF defers to institutions to determine the appropriate credit hours of a degree.

#### Program Integration

- GEOINT certificate programs may be offered as a degree enhancement or as an independent certificate (i.e., stand-alone certificate).
- It's recommended that certificate programs are offered as widely as possible (cross-departmental, Center, Consortium).
- Students who complete the program, regardless of their major, may receive a certificate of achievement from USGIF.

## USGIF Accredited Institutions

- ◆ Delta State University
- ◆ Fayetteville State University
- ◆ George Mason University
- ◆ Indiana University of Pennsylvania
- ◆ James Madison University
- ◆ Johns Hopkins University
- ◆ North Carolina Central University
- ◆ Nova Informational Management School
- ◆ Pennsylvania State University
- ◆ Saint Louis University
- ◆ University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign
- ◆ University of Maryland
- ◆ University of Missouri
- ◆ University of North Carolina – Wilmington
- ◆ University of North Georgia
- ◆ University of South Carolina
- ◆ University of South Dakota
- ◆ University of Southern California
- ◆ United States Air Force Academy
- ◆ United States Coast Guard Academy
- ◆ United States Military Academy
- ◆ University of Texas – Dallas
- ◆ Virginia Tech

## Accreditation Basics

Before pursuing accreditation, programs should consider whether they have the time, resources, and commitment to complete the process. In many cases, initial accreditation is not awarded until one (1) year after the initial Letter of Intent has been submitted.

USGIF's accreditation is a voluntary, rigorous self-review and peer evaluation process.

## Accreditation Cycle

USGIF's accreditation takes place on a rolling basis, ensuring that schools and faculty can begin the process of accreditation at a time that works for them. The basic steps and estimated timeline are below:

<b>Application Action</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Submit application fee and letter of intent to USGIF	

USGIF provides applicants with accreditation package	Within 1 month of receiving the application fee and letter of intent
Applicants submit accreditation package. USGIF sends letter of receipt and begins site visit scheduling	Due within 6 months of receiving accreditation package from USGIF
Review of program's accreditation package begins. This is completed by external reviewers.	This process can take several months, but will be completed within three months of initial submission
USGIF completes a site visit, giving applicants a 30-day notice	Within three months of receiving accreditation package
USGIF notifies applicants of accreditation decision. Depending on status, more steps may follow	A decision will be granted at minimum, six months following receipt of accreditation package

## Accreditation Step-by-Step

### Step 1: Application Fee and Letter of Intent

Prior to receiving the accreditation package, programs must pay the application fee of \$350 and submit a Letter of Intent to USGIF. The Letter of Intent must address the program's compliance with program eligibility criteria and be signed by an individual from the institution who has administrative signature authority (e.g., President/Chancellor, Vice-President/Vice-Chancellor, Provost).

It is also important to note that upon accreditation, accredited institutions are expected to have and maintain a USGIF Academic Membership. The fee is \$2,500 per year. The additional benefits include:

- Organizational member benefits, as outlined [here](#)
- Two (2) complimentary GEOINT Symposium full-conference registrations and two (2) Foreword registrations for faculty
- Five (5) complimentary GEOINT Symposium full-conference registrations and five (5) Foreword registrations for students
- Ability to exhibit at a discounted rate in the GEOINT Symposium "Academic Pavilion"
- Member pricing to advertise in *Trajectory Magazine*

### Step 2: Accreditation Package

The official application package is provided once USGIF has received an applicant's Letter of Intent and application fee. USGIF generally sends the package within one (1) week of receiving

fees and a Letter of Intent but may take up to one (1) month to supply materials. Included in the accreditation package are:

- a. A Self-Study Report
- b. The EBK Matrix
- c. A Program of Study template
- d. USGIF's *Collegiate Geospatial Intelligence Accreditation Program Policies and Procedures Manual*
- e. USGIF's *Collegiate Geospatial Intelligence Accreditation Program Standards and Criteria Manual*

a) Self-Study Report

The Self-Study Report is a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the strengths and limitations of the institution and program. Programs may make their own determination of how they will conduct their Self-Study, but they must follow the specific outline provided by USGIF. The strengths and limitations of the programs will be compared to the accreditation standards set forth by USGIF.

b) Essential Body of Knowledge (EBK) Matrix

The EBK Matrix is a quantitative assessment of a program's coverage of the competencies stated in USGIF's GEOINT EBK. The EBK Matrix allows USGIF to assess whether programs are covering an appropriate breadth of essential GEOINT topics. Programs must use the GEOINT EBK template provided by USGIF. This template is included in the accreditation package as an editable Excel document.

c) Program of Study

The Program of Study is a qualitative assessment of a program's coverage of the competencies stated in USGIF's GEOINT EBK. The Program of Study has two parts, a course list and an external activities list. Programs must use the Program of Study template created by USGIF. This template is included in the application package as an editable Word document.

d) Collegiate Geospatial Intelligence Accreditation Program Policies and Procedures Manual

This document is a comprehensive guide to USGIF's accreditation process. It includes policies and guidelines for both USGIF and the applicant during the accreditation process.

e) Collegiate Geospatial Intelligence Accreditation Program Standards and Criteria Manual

This document provides in-depth explanations of the various components required by an accredited program. The standards it discusses span students, faculty, facilities, curriculum, partnerships, and more.

The accreditation package is completed by the applying institution's program faculty. It must be submitted to USGIF within six (6) months of receipt of accreditation package materials. Accreditation packages not received by this time will not be reviewed and applicants will need to resubmit for accreditation, starting with a new Letter of Intent (fee will be waived if previously paid). The accreditation package must be sent to the USGIF Director of Education and Professional Development.

### Step 3: Application Review Begins

Within one (1) week of the submission date of the accreditation package, all accreditation materials will be sent to three third-party reviewers who will determine the program's compliance with USGIF's accreditation standards.

Within three (3) months of receiving the accreditation package, third-party reviewers will submit their recommended accreditation action to USGIF's Director of Academic Programs. Accreditation actions available to reviewers include (1) "Award," (2) "Minor Revisions Needed," (3) "Major Revisions Needed", and (4) "Do Not Accredit". For a description of these actions, see below.

The Director of Education and Professional Development will compile the recommendations from the reviewers and provide USGIF's CEO with a recommendation on whether the program should be accredited. The final decision on accreditation rests with USGIF's CEO. Once USGIF's CEO has made their decision, the Director of Education and Professional Development will notify the applicant. Below is a summary of each accreditation recommendation:

*Accredit* | Accreditation is granted if current conditions are judged to be meeting or exceeding the minimum requirements set forth by the accreditation standards. Accreditation is valid for a five-year period.

*Minor Revisions Needed* | This action indicates that the program has displayed some minor deficiencies or weaknesses that must be addressed prior to receiving accreditation. The program must submit their minor corrections to USGIF's Director of Education and Professional Development within one month of receiving the decision. No further external review is needed.

*Major Revisions Needed* | This action indicates that a program demonstrates strong promise but needs to address certain areas before a decision on the accreditation package can be made. Programs that receive this action will be given feedback on which program areas must be addressed. Programs will have six months to address the concerns brought to them. At the end of the six months, programs must submit their revision package. The revision package includes the program's response to USGIF's initial feedback, evidence of how the program addressed the feedback, and, if applicable, any other substantive changes that occurred during the six-month period as it relates to their original accreditation package. Programs may only receive this accreditation action once. If a program was not able to adequately address the

deficiencies identified by USGIF reviewers, then the program will receive a “Do Not Accredited” action.

*Do Not Accredited* | Programs that receive this action display severe deficiencies or weaknesses in their accreditation package that are unlikely to be addressed within the six-month period available under “Major Revisions Needed”.

#### Step 4: Site Visit

This step happens concurrently with the third-party review of the accreditation package. By submitting a Letter of Intent, each program agrees to host a USGIF Site Visiting Team (Site Team) and allow them access to all GEOINT-related facilities, faculty and collegiate administrators, and all learning environments so they may fully assess the program.

The Site Team will consist of a minimum of two (2) members, the USGIF Director of Education and Professional Development and one (1) GEOINT subject matter expert (SME). The site visit will take place over two days with all expenses to be paid by the institution/program seeking accreditation. The site visit will occur after the programs’ submission of the full accreditation package. USGIF will provide programs notice of the Site Team’s arrival at least 30-days in advance and notify the program’s lead of which faculty and administrative staff they need to meet.

#### Step 5: Applicant is Notified of Accreditation Status

After all the steps in the accreditation process have been completed, USGIF will notify the applicant of the final accreditation decision (see the above section on “application review” for accreditation actions). If granted, accreditation of a program is valid for five years. The term of accreditation is subject to review at any time during the period of accreditation.

Accreditation must be maintained by the accredited program and academic institution. For programs to maintain their accredited status, they must:

1. Submit an Annual Program Review Report
2. Submit an Annual Academic Partner fee

Like the Self-Study Report, the Annual Program Review Report is a qualitative and quantitative assessment. This report is a tool USGIF uses to assess a program’s commitment to continuous improvement. Programs may decide on their own how they wish to complete the assessment, but the report must follow the outline provided by USGIF.

#### Reaccreditation

Programs are eligible to apply for reaccreditation entering the final year of their five-year accreditation term. USGIF will inform accredited programs of their need to start the reaccreditation process six (6) months in advance. More information about reaccreditation policies can be found in USGIF’s Accreditation Policies & Procedures document.



## Contact information

Any additional questions regarding USGIF accreditation can be sent to [education@usgif.org](mailto:education@usgif.org).