

Home & business productivity, Law enforcement

New report: The state of law enforcement paperwork in 2021

Nuance Communications

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Our annual report on the role of technology in law enforcement paperwork delivers a unique snapshot of a period of acute pressure. Pre-pandemic, the documentation burden was already a major stressor for officers and support staff, but rising demand during lockdowns exacerbated the issue. The pandemic also had a major impact on working patterns, with leaders struggling to balance demand with recruitment and retention. Technology is proving an attractive route to finding new tools for productivity and flexibility in police work—yet for this to be successful, decision-makers will need to switch from point solutions to a more holistic approach.

This year, we interviewed law enforcement professionals in a variety of roles to build a detailed snapshot of their day-to-day paperwork requirements, and how they approach them using different tools and systems. This research provided another interesting angle: how law enforcement's documentation burden and general workload has increased during the pandemic.

Our respondents saw a significant rise in public demand for their services in 2021, from helping manage community curfews to responding to a spike in domestic disturbance calls during stay-at-home orders. These orders saw law enforcement officers pulling double duty by helping the government and public health organizations control the spread of COVID-19 while serving the community as usual.

Here, we've collated three key findings from the [2021 Role of Technology in Law Enforcement Paperwork Annual Report](#).

1. Documentation burdens grow while productivity shrinks

Almost half of our respondents agree that the pandemic increased their documentation burden. Every extra responsibility, call out, public interaction, and process introduced during the past 18 months needs its own documentation. Combine that with regulations like NIBRS, which demands a high level of detail in every report, and the burden grows dramatically; more than two-thirds agree that federal mandates and regulations are adding to their documentation requirements.

This is having a direct knock-on effect on productivity—to the point where time spent on documentation is limiting how much time officers can spend in the community. In fact, nearly 90% of our respondents are concerned about officers not being able to serve as effectively due to their incident report workload. Almost half named writing and filing incident reports as the most significant drain on productivity, with 54% saying that they spend at least two hours a day just on paperwork—and 16% of those respondents are spending more than four hours of their shift writing up reports.

2. Respondents recognize the importance of “PoliceTech”

The lack of digital processes in place to help officers accelerate admin and other documentation tasks has been [a common theme in our annual reports](#). However, like other sectors, the pandemic has renewed interest in helpful technologies like productivity tools, video conferencing platforms, and even virtual assistants.

Reliance on mobile hardware and software has increased substantially since March 2020, and two-thirds believe that communication and productivity tools their departments adopted during the pandemic—such as Microsoft Teams—are here to stay.

More generally, the ubiquity of connected home tech has led to 89% of our respondents agreeing that a “connected workplace” of apps and assistants would be useful—and a third say that their department is increasingly open to investing in dedicated PoliceTech. With the majority of departments we surveyed naming officer productivity and omnipresence as their primary focus points, cloud-based solutions are proving popular. For example, 60% are already using mobile apps to streamline field reporting, which also helps reduce the amount of time officers need to spend sitting in their cars.

3. This year's report reaffirms common themes

Although the last year represented a unique set of circumstances for the police chiefs and command staff we spoke to, many of the challenges and goals were familiar.

The documentation burden is a constant concern for decision-makers in the sector, and COVID-19 only exacerbated the difficulty of balancing presence in the community with accurate, detailed reporting.

The pandemic also coincided with recruitment and retention issues for law enforcement, which meant that adequate resourcing was an additional challenge when new COVID-19 protocols, such as processing documentation ahead of sally port transfer, were implemented.

In many sectors, processes that were “good enough” in normal circumstances buckled under the extra weight of their new pandemic-related responsibilities; this may very well have been the case for law enforcement too. Trying to manage inefficient processes and higher demand can lead to officer burnout—so decision-makers may need to make major changes soon.

As in other sectors, PoliceTech will need to move away from discrete point solutions that tackle individual productivity or documentation issues as they crop up. Although a mobile app for incident reporting may speed up documentation in the field, for example, it's only truly useful if it integrates with the rest of the force's systems, such as the RMS. With a holistic approach to tackling inefficient processes across departments, forces can make the most of their resources, and turn their attention to long-term transformation, exploring more advanced options such as the future of ambient listening devices for automated interview transcription.

Read the full report now

To dig deeper into how the paperwork burden is affecting law enforcement teams and how decision-makers are adjusting to the sector's “new normal”, get the full [2021 Role of Technology in Law Enforcement Paperwork Annual Report](#) now.

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More Information

Read the report

Get the full report to see how the challenging conditions of the last year have affected law enforcement's approach to documentation.

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