



HOW TO OVERCOME THE CHAOS OF MANAGING officer schedules



survey results

SHOW THE CHALLENGES OF MANAGING OFFICER SCHEDULES

Shifting schedules have long sparked complaints among police officers. Not every police department faces the same woes of unpredictable hours and on-call shifts, but fluctuating officer schedules pose challenges for many. In recent years, studies have found that for many officers, **working erratic shifts** can take a major toll on their well-being.

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— MARK PUGLIESE, Chief of Police
West Hempfield Township
Police Department in Lancaster, PA

The reality is that the police force never sleeps. While there’s no shortage of community policing demands, officer needs can’t just go ignored, including: transparent overtime management, fair scheduling practices and flexibility in scheduling paid time off.

In a climate of heightened scrutiny and concern for officer morale and wellness, as well as departments needing to control overtime-related costs, more police leaders are looking for ways to find efficiency in shift scheduling. The question then becomes, how do you balance shrinking budgets with a growing list of officer responsibilities?

For police leaders, shift schedule management often is a part-time headache

A 2018 survey by **PoliceOne** queried 908 officers, including captains, chiefs, sheriffs, lieutenants, sergeants, officers and deputies from large to small-sized departments, gathered feedback on ways scheduling complexities and inefficiencies can be reduced. Not surprisingly, the data revealed that not having the right tools to manage shift schedules was one of the biggest hurdles facing departments.

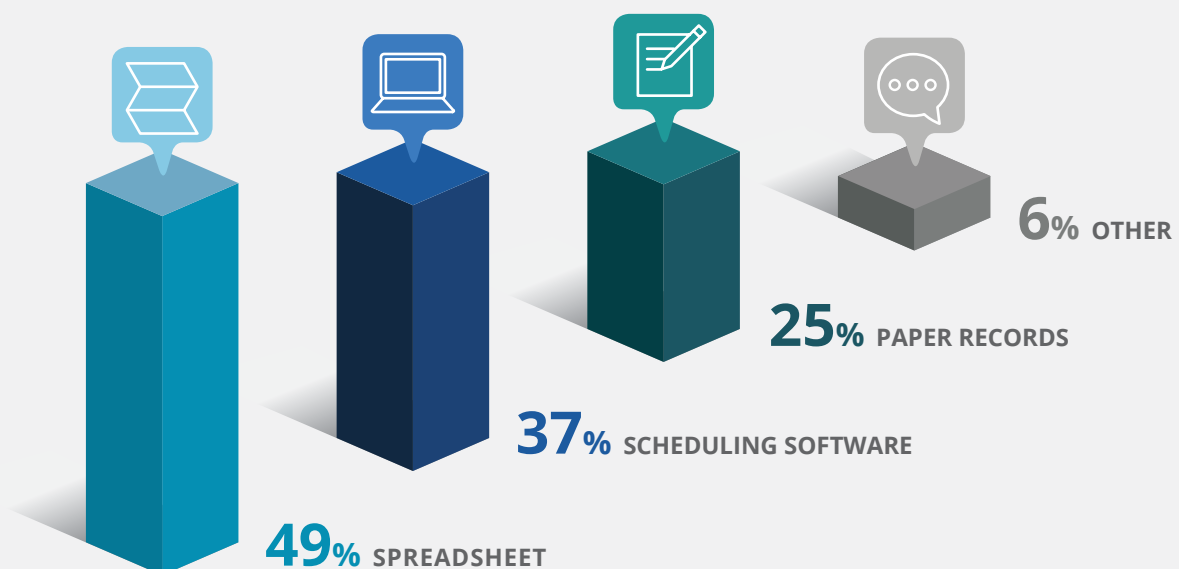
One notable finding from the survey was that almost half (49 percent) of respondents' agencies still relied on using spreadsheets, and 25 percent said their agency used a paper-based record system to keep track of shift schedules.

"It was a scheduling nightmare to jot down and make paper copy records of officers' time off, shift swaps and other issues in a handwritten log in a binder," said Mark Pugliese, chief of police at the West Hempfield Township Police Department in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. "It took two hours or even more every day to keep up with this."

The strain of managing schedules added up over time. More hours spent on handling administrative work meant less time was put in for adequately policing the community.

Pugliese's agency is not alone when it comes to relying on antiquated, manual methods of scheduling officer time. But relying on outdated and inefficient methods of managing officer time can become costly to departments.

How does your department manage employee schedules?



did you know?

SHIFT LENGTH CAN IMPACT OFFICER PERFORMANCE

Research from the **Police Foundation** shows that shift length impacts an officer's performance, safety, quality of life, health and overtime use.

The foundation's **Shift Length Experiment** considered three different shift lengths (eight, 10- and 12-hour intervals) and concluded that 10-hour shifts led officers to sleep more (approximately 30 minutes more), file for less overtime and report an increased quality of work life, as opposed to those on eight-hour shifts.

Officers who worked 12-hour shifts also filed for less overtime than those on eight-hour shifts, but still more than those on 10-hour shifts. In addition, officers with 12-hour shifts reported that they felt significantly less alert than those working eight-hour shifts. In addition, officers who worked 10-hour shifts were also more likely to report increased safety and wellness (thanks to the added sleep they get), which leads to fewer fatigue-related performance problems.



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Dr. Karen Amendola, the lead researcher behind this project, explained that for medium to large police departments, it's worth looking into implementing a 10-hour shift schedule to maximize cost savings. But she also cautioned that this solution doesn't necessarily work well for smaller departments.

Ultimately, police chiefs need to factor in community policing needs and other departmental concerns to weigh the pros and cons of making sweeping changes to officer schedules.

How scheduling technology can empower officers to focus on policing that matters

Agencies can avoid the pitfalls that come with clunky and slow scheduling processes by embracing scheduling software. Without a doubt, technology has introduced cycles of change throughout the world, both in and out of the workplace. That's why it can be jarring for today's new, modern officer to grapple with inefficient ways of managing work hours.

Here are three ways scheduling software can make a positive difference in your agency:

1

Increase control and flexibility of on-duty and off-duty hours

2

Reducing mistakes and providing fairness by adhering to rules & policies

3

Increase employee productivity and engagement

Increase control and flexibility of on-duty and off-duty hours

It's not uncommon for officers to get frustrated with scheduling processes. Agencies often don't have the necessary tools to keep track of the flux and volume of requests for time off and shift swaps. Scheduling software makes it easy to track assigned shifts and requests for changes.

Instead of spending hours poring over spreadsheet requests or handwritten notes, why not use an online program that simplifies scheduling into a task that takes less than 15 minutes?

"Using a platform like **PlanIt Schedule** helped me keep track of all of the different moving parts and last-minute changes to people's schedule changes," said Chief Pugliese. "Now I spend 15 minutes or less a day to approve my department's schedule."

Increase transparency of officer schedules and scheduling processes

Transparency is a cornerstone of effective policing practices that build trust, so it makes sense to promote visibility and openness in all corners of your department to foster a culture of accountability.

Senior officers commonly get priority when it comes to choosing available shifts, but it can quickly become a puzzle to piece in dozens of other officer availabilities. That's why having a platform that can help leaders take an organized approach to fielding shift bids can also help get everyone on the same page by giving officers a bird's-eye view of everyone's availability.

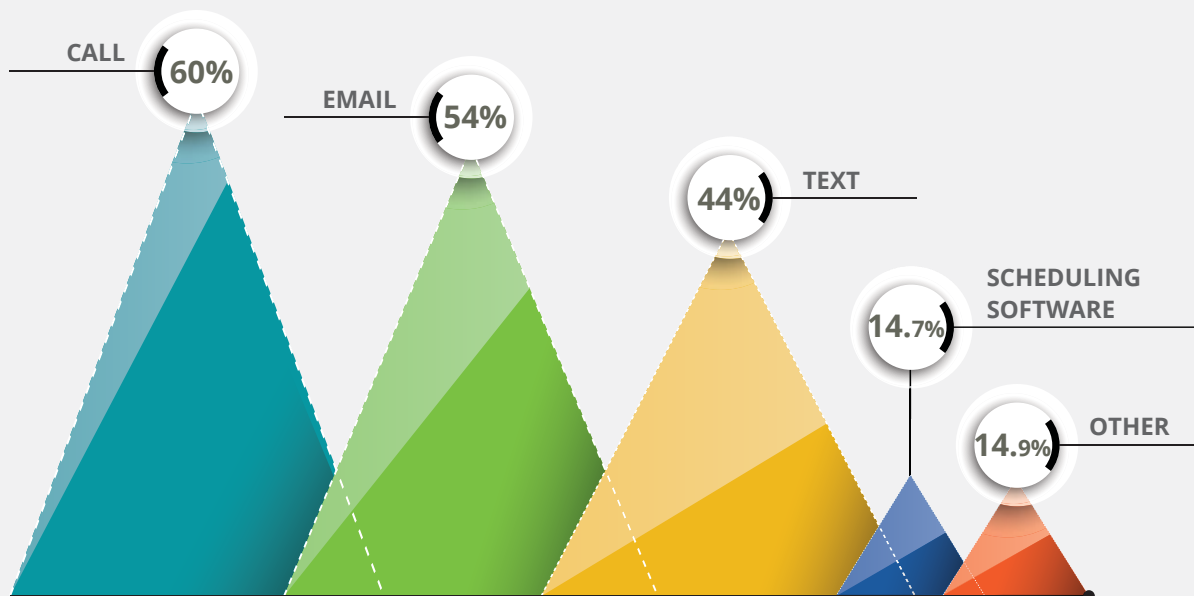
Figuring out officer availability during moments of crisis shouldn't be another piece of the puzzle for leaders who need to act fast. More than half of officers in the survey

noted that they pick up the phone to fill in those open shifts. Relying on this outdated method could erode the trust of officers, especially if they find out that not all officers are notified simultaneously about possible shift openings.

"I used to call every single officer in the department to figure out if they could respond to a certain incident, but not having to deal with that has taken such a huge load off of my shoulders," said Pugliese, who oversees about 21 officers.

But now it only takes a few clicks here and there for police chiefs like Pugliese to send out mass notifications that can help them gauge officer availability. With this tool, now every officer in the department has an equal chance to respond.

How does your department find people to fill open shifts for regular staffing needs or for special assignments?



Increase employee productivity and engagement

Officer engagement is high on the list of priorities for department leaders. Although most police officers are committed to their agency's success, the existence of less positive views about the agency's culture and perceived inability to address scheduling issues can become dangerous.

With the right scheduling tool, police leaders can take a more proactive approach to officer scheduling and workload management. Some platforms can give police chiefs a greater level of control allowing them to easily set minimum staffing levels by division and fill open shifts.

Modern scheduling software, like **PlanIt Schedule**, can give departmental heads more control through:

1. Calendar and timeline editor features.
2. Minimum, double staff warning notifications.
3. Bulk updating capabilities.
4. A dashboard that gives all officers the same visibility of the department's real-time schedule.
5. Automatic minimum staffing rules that can create new open shifts when a department falls below set minimum staffing levels.
6. Templates that can process complex to simple rotations
7. Time off request and approval management.
8. Court appearance notifications and visibility.
9. Shift trade features.
10. Robust reporting tools that are easily configurable.

Pugliese says that using a modern scheduling tool has allowed his department to not only save time but also invest more time and resources in assignments and duties that officers find more meaningful.



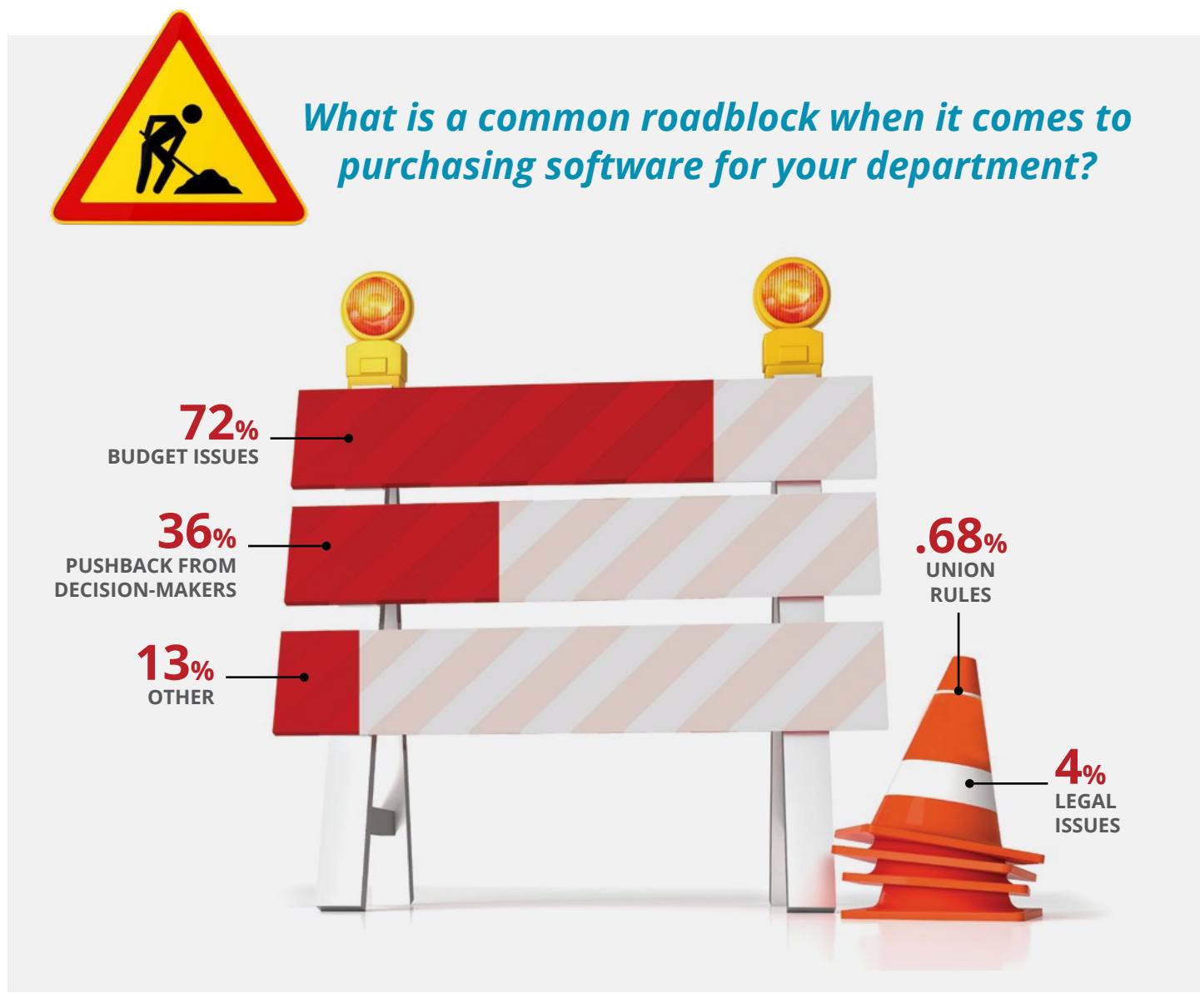
“PlanIt Schedule is more than just a scheduling tool,” Pugliese said. It’s modernized our entire department’s approach to time management and has inspired us to take more strategic approaches to identify efficiency gaps within our department.”

How departments can overcome funding barriers to adopting new technology

Budget constraints often limit the ability for agencies to embrace digital tools, even the ones that offer a clear return on investment.

Police technology grants, however, can help departments fund online scheduling tools. Consider both online and offline grant opportunities to pay for the startup and maintenance costs of adopting scheduling software.

Some companies, like **PlanIt Schedule**, offer an affordable all-in-one subscription fee so that once it is on the budget it is simple to manage.

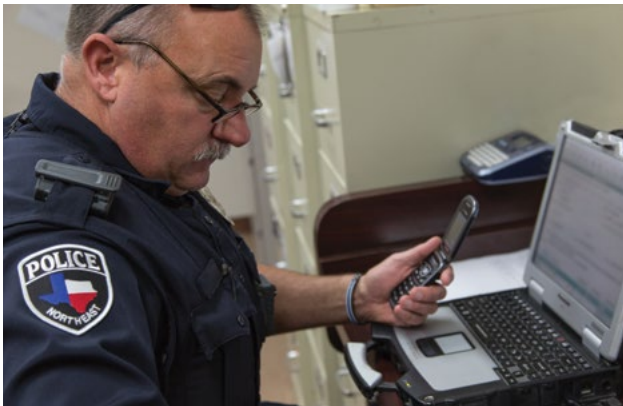




Conclusion

The benefit of a modern scheduling tool is clear. It can untether officers from administrative tasks – eliminating hours spent on approving or submitting requests – all while ensuring that scheduling needs and requests are being fulfilled without causing headache.

Implementing an online scheduling management system can offer immediate and lasting benefits to an agency by giving police more control of their schedules, improving scheduling transparency within the department and by engaging officers to become more productive and invested in non-administrative policing duties that better align with the department's priorities.



About PlanIt Schedule

PlanIt Schedule, created, maintained and supported by Ragnasoft Inc., is based in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and has been in business since 1999. They provide a robust yet easy-to-use personnel scheduling system for law enforcement, EMS, fire and dispatch agencies throughout the U.S.

For more information, visit
www.planitpolice.com