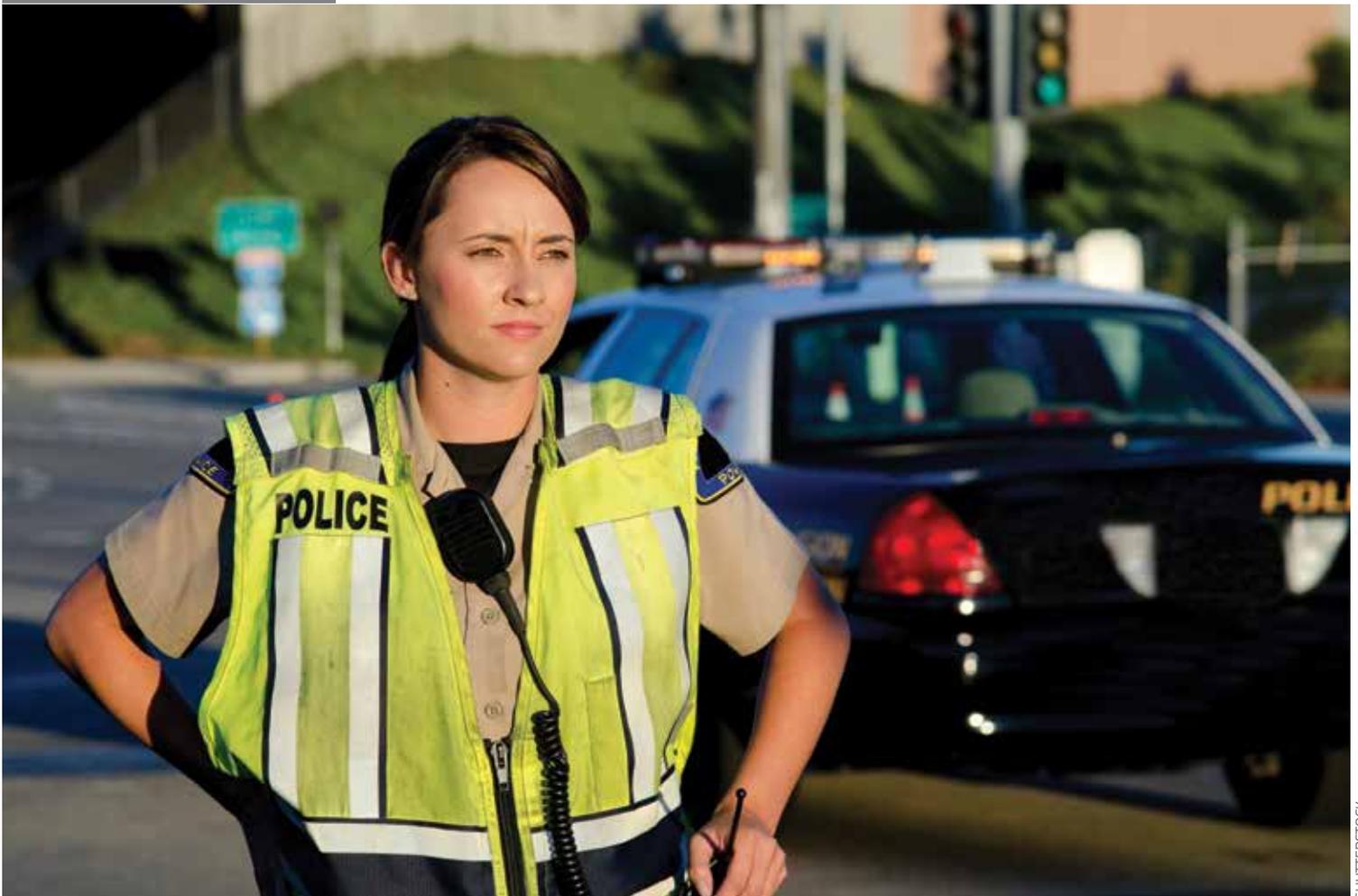# First Responder and Law Enforcement Mobility

April 2014

Introduction

Mobile devices have taken the world by storm. Citizens are enamored with their smartphones and tablets — 60 percent of mobile subscribers in the U.S. owned a smartphone as of May 2013[1] and 34 percent of Americans owned a tablet.[2] Government agencies have been slower to adopt mobile devices than private sector organizations due to limited budgets and cultural barriers, but increased efficiency and productivity, return on investment (ROI) and an incoming younger generation attached to their devices have spurred a mobile revolution in government as well.

But what about the law enforcement and first responder community? Dealing with daily life-and-death situations and the need for up-to-the-minute communications makes them a prime target for the benefits mobile technology has to offer.

In early 2014, the Center for Digital Government (CDG) surveyed state and local government IT professionals in the law enforcement and first responder community to gain insight on their mobile device adoption, employee access to those devices, challenges and what they most hoped to gain from mobile technology. This report provides information on their responses.
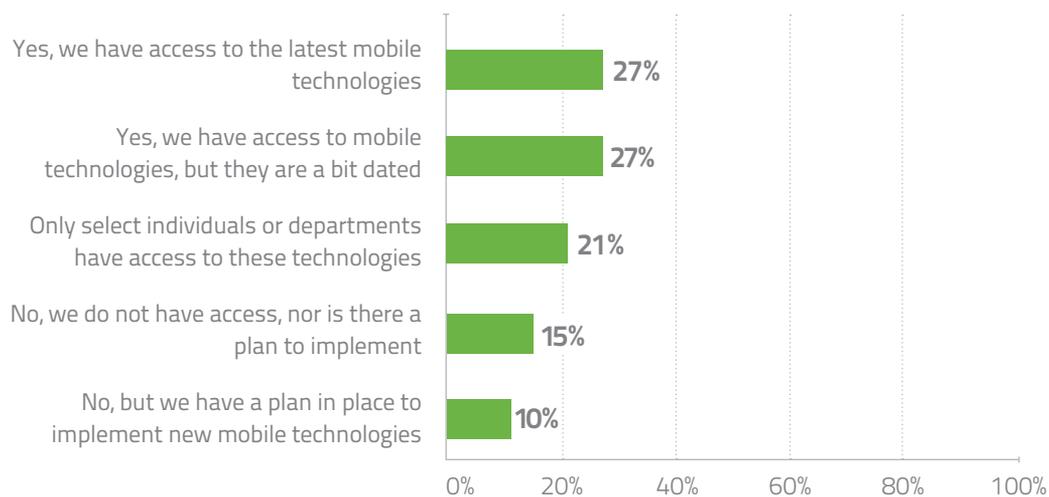

About our Respondents

Of the 101 state and local government IT professionals surveyed, 59 percent identified themselves as working in law enforcement, 18 percent in fire rescue and 12 percent in emergency management. The remaining 11 percent identified themselves as working in public works, emergency medical services or 'other." Thirty-eight percent of respondents were employed by a city, 22 percent by a county, 21 percent by a state, 12 percent by the federal government and 7 percent by a regional entity.

While the results of this survey cannot be projected to the entire population, the results are reflective of those who subscribe to *Government Technology* magazine with a maximum sampling error in this survey of +/- 9.7 percentage points at 95 percent confidence.
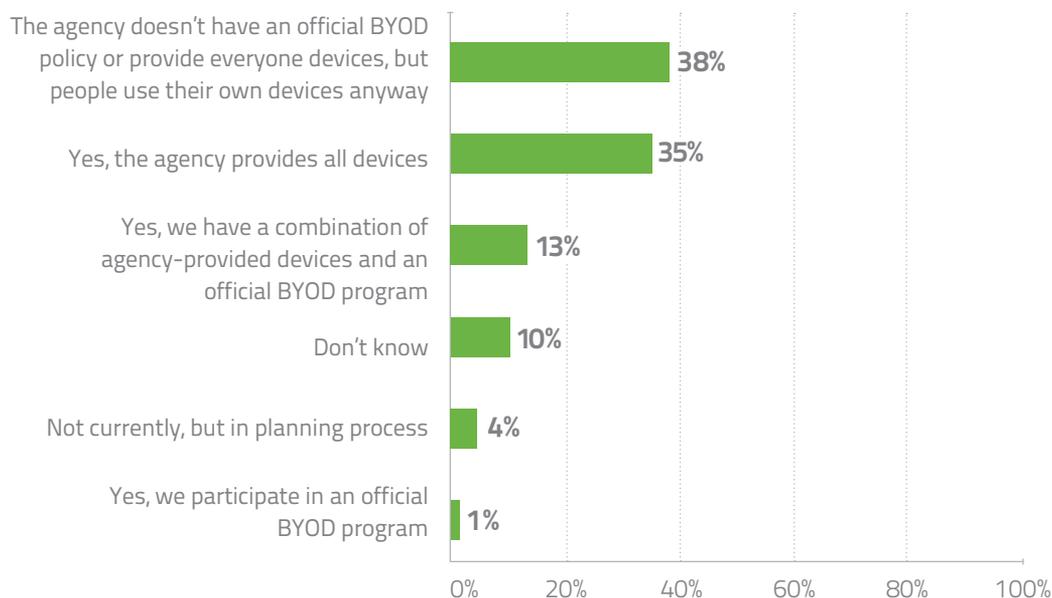
Mobile Device / Mobile Technology Use

Over half of respondents (54%) noted they had access to mobile technologies, although 27 percent said these technologies were slightly outdated. However, a relatively high number of respondents said they didn't have access to these technologies or only select departments had access (47%). While some agencies provide devices to employees, 38 percent acknowledge their agency does not provide devices to everyone and employees used their own devices despite the lack of an official BYOD policy or program. This indicates a lack of strategy and a hodgepodge of devices being used. When this is done, there can be increased security risks and inefficiencies due to interoperability issues.

Do you feel your law enforcement/first responder agency has adequate access to mobile technologies?

Yes, we have access to the latest mobile technologies	27%
Yes, we have access to mobile technologies, but they are a bit dated	27%
Only select individuals or departments have access to these technologies	21%
No, we do not have access, nor is there a plan to implement	15%
No, but we have a plan in place to implement new mobile technologies	10%

Does your organization provide mobile devices/technologies?

The agency doesn't have an official BYOD policy or provide everyone devices, but people use their own devices anyway	38%
Yes, the agency provides all devices	35%
Yes, we have a combination of agency-provided devices and an official BYOD program	13%
Don't know	10%
Not currently, but in planning process	4%
Yes, we participate in an official BYOD program	1%

What types of devices are currently utilized/provided?

Device	Percentage
Laptops	82%
Smartphones	62%
Basic cell phones	49%
Tablets	35%
Pagers	16%
Other	9%
Messaging only devices	7%
Chromebooks	2%
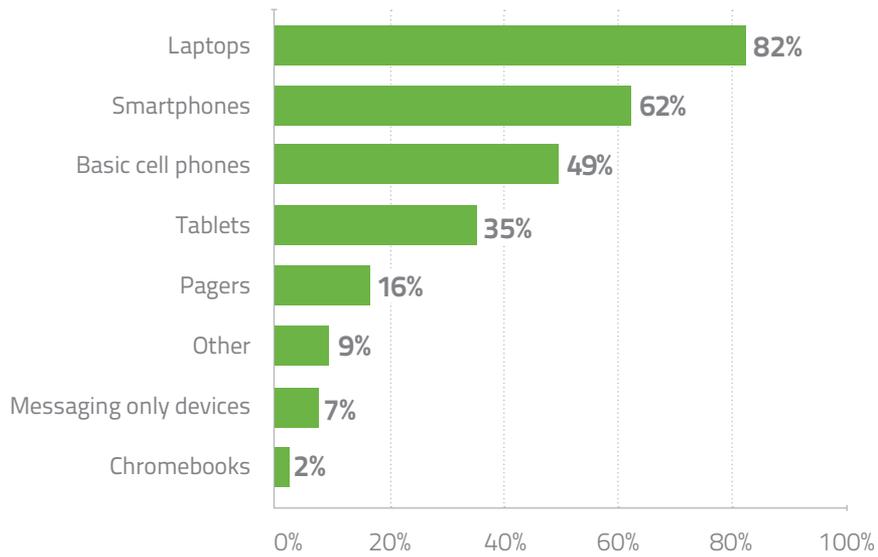
Which of the following technologies has your organization already implemented?

Technology	Percentage
Wireless VPN for security services	50%
Custom mobile application	25%
Other	20%
Applications/software in the cloud	18%
Virtualized desktops	15%
Virtualized storage environment	14%
Software as a Service (SaaS)	8%
Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS)	6%
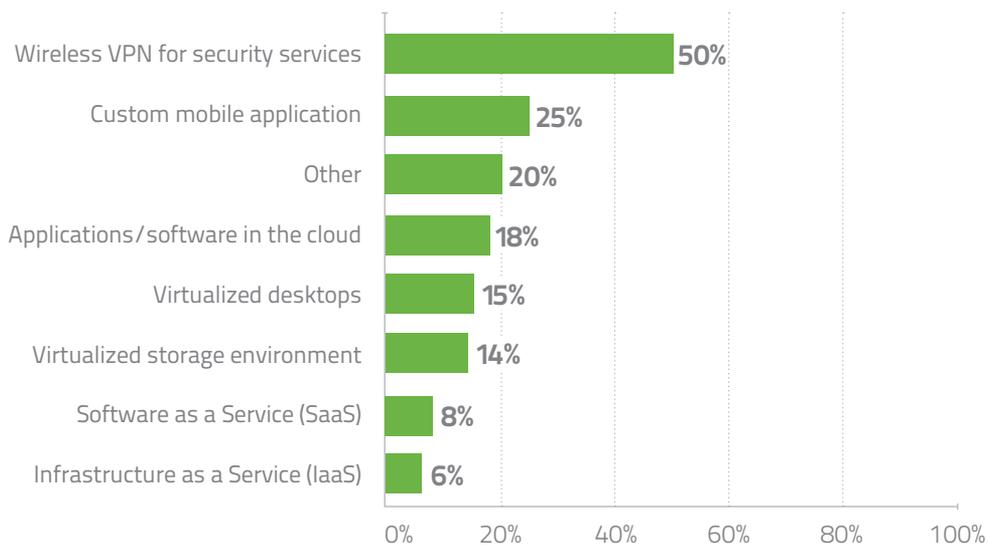
Challenges, Barriers to Mobility and Unmet Needs

When it came to major barriers and challenges, the usual suspects were respondents' most frequently cited answers: funding (58%) and security concerns (14%). Respondents said their No.1 unmet need was access to custom applications to assis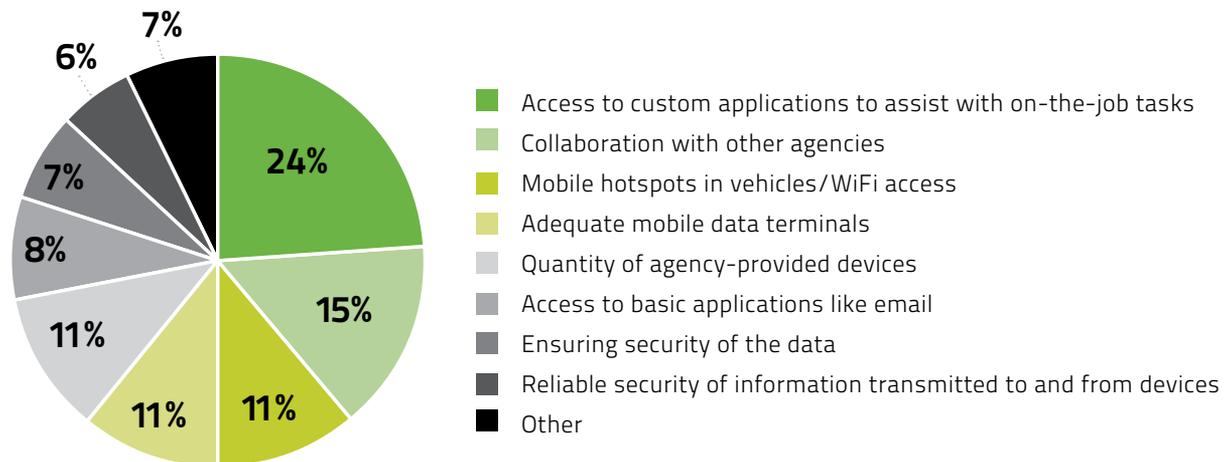t with on-the-job tasks — this might include applications to access criminal records or GPS location of fellow officers or emergency personnel. When asked what desktop applications their agency uses that they would like to have mobile enabled, respondents most favored GPS tracking applications (35%), case/records management applications (20%) and ID/verification apps (14%).

What major barriers exist within your organization in addressing mobility?

4% 3% 2%

5%

6%

8%

58%

14%

- Lack of funding
- Security concerns
- Lack of skilled IT staff
- Other priorities prevent focusing on mobility at this time
- Lack of support (business, legislative or executive)
- Increasing sophistication of new technologies
- Other
- Lack of information about available technologies
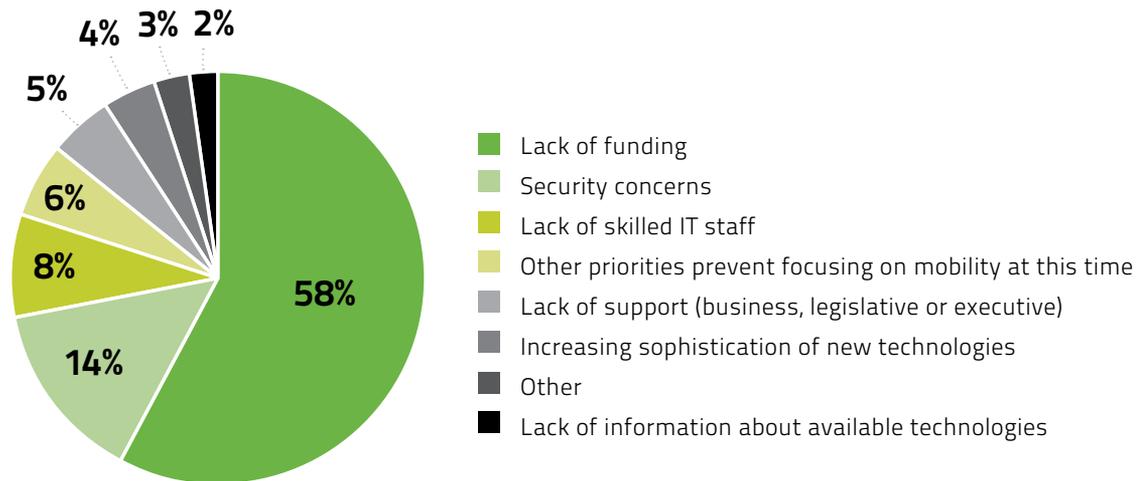
What is your No. 1 unmet need when it comes to mobility?

7%

6%

7%

8%

11%

11%   11%

15%

24%

- Access to custom applications to assist with on-the-job tasks
- Collaboration with other agencies
- Mobile hotspots in vehicles/WiFi access
- Adequate mobile data terminals
- Quantity of agency-provided devices
- Access to basic applications like email
- Ensuring security of the data
- Reliable security of information transmitted to and from devices
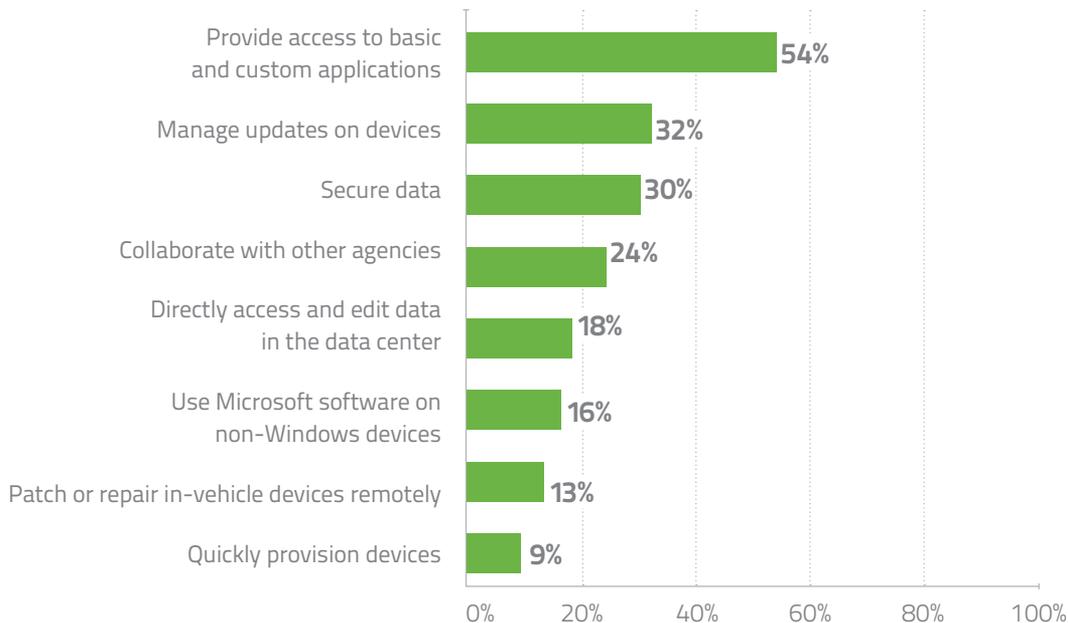- Other

Moving Forward / New Technologies

When asked what they believed would receive the largest focus and financial investment in the next several years, 34 percent of respondents selected custom mobile applications. This is in line with 24 percent of respondents saying their No.1 unmet need was lack of access to custom mobile applications. Interestingly, 54 percent of respondents noted that virtual desktops allow them to provide access to basic and custom applications — exactly what they are looking to do — but, according to the survey, only 15 percent of organizations are currently using virtual desktops. Thirty percent of respondents also noted that virtual desktops help secure data, which was their second largest painpoint.
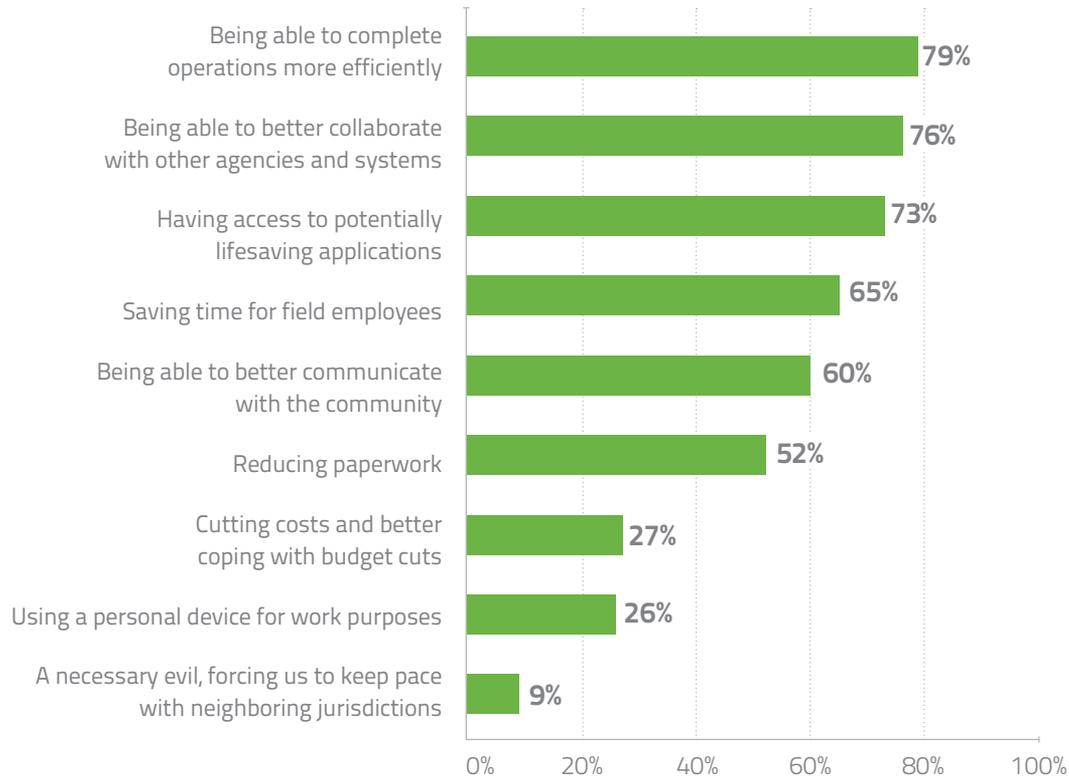
Which areas do you think will receive the largest focus/financial investment in the next one to two years?

Area	Percent
Custom mobile applications	34%
Applications/software in the cloud	27%
Wireless VPN for security purposes	22%
Virtualized storage environment	17%
Virtualized desktops	14%
Software as a Service (SaaS)	11%
Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS)	11%
Other	9%
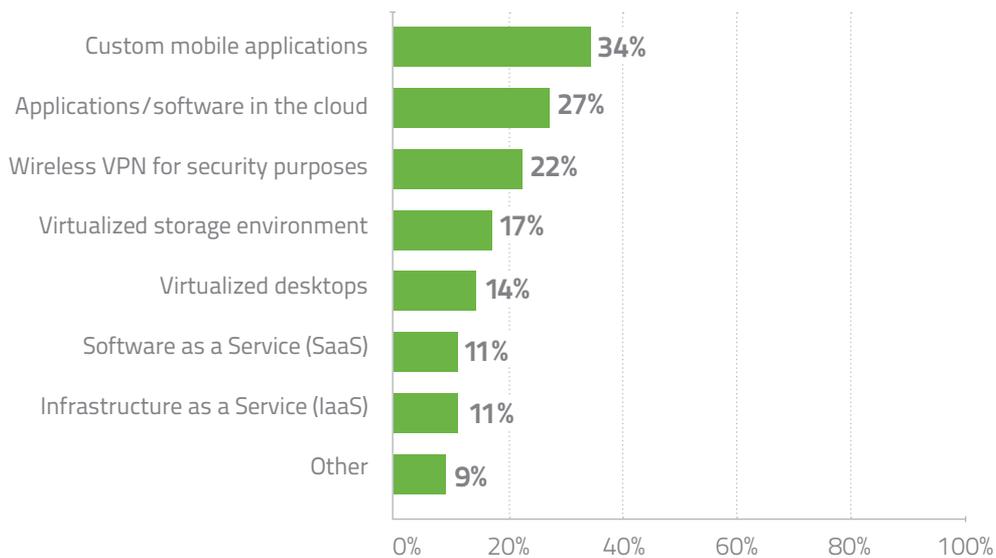
Which of the following do virtual desktops allow you to do?

Option	Percent
Provide access to basic and custom applications	54%
Manage updates on devices	32%
Secure data	30%
Collaborate with other agencies	24%
Directly access and edit data in the data center	18%
Use Microsoft software on non-Windows devices	16%
Patch or repair in-vehicle devices remotely	13%
Quickly provision devices	9%

What does mobility mean for the law enforcement/first responder community?

Being able to complete operations more efficiently	79%
Being able to better collaborate with other agencies and systems	76%
Having access to potentially lifesaving applications	73%
Saving time for field employees	65%
Being able to better communicate with the community	60%
Reducing paperwork	52%
Cutting costs and better coping with budget cuts	27%
Using a personal device for work purposes	26%
A necessary evil, forcing us to keep pace with neighboring jurisdictions	9%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Conclusion

Overall, mobile adoption in public safety organizations is at 54 percent — but 27 percent noted these were "outdated" technologies and 38 percent of respondents said employees brought their own devices despite the fact their agency did not have a formal BYOD policy or program. Public safety and first responder personnel would most like to have access to custom applications to do their jobs — but this can be difficult to implement without a mobile device strategy or technology like virtualization. While 54 percent of respondents said desktop virtualization helped provide access to custom applications, only 15 percent of them noted they were currently using this technology.

Endnotes

1.   www.nielsen.com/us/en/newswire/2013/mobile-majority--u-s--smartphone-ownership-tops-60-.html
2.   www.pewinternet.org/2013/06/10/tablet-ownership-2013