

# 7 LESSONS LEARNED FROM 47 USPS PROJECTS

UNITED STATES  
POSTAL SERVICE

Florida Logistics & Distribution Center  
Jacksonville, FL



**KORTE**

build smart.™



The U.S. Postal Service is one of our most reliable repeat customers. As of early 2018, we've delivered nearly 50 projects of various types and sizes for this crucial federal agency, the bulk of them being key [distribution and processing centers](#). Every single one of them has offered an opportunity to learn how to deliver better faster and smarter—something we think is critical to the success of any [Design-Build construction](#) company.

You don't come away from that many jobs well done without some important lessons learned. We think these are among the most significant.



## 1. LISTEN CAREFULLY AND TAKE NOTES

It's the simplest lesson we've learned and probably the easiest to implement, but it may also be the most important.

Much has changed since the beginning of our partnership with the USPS, both in terms of construction practices and the way the Postal Service operates. That's why recording what we've learned and referring to it on subsequent jobs has been so important to our success. Here's how it helps:

- With a bank of existing knowledge to draw from, our teams come well-prepared to manage USPS jobs. We know the customer. We know their processes. We know their expectations.
- Having completed so many USPS jobs, very little takes us by surprise at this point. Projects are completed without headaches or delays because everyone is on the same page.
- We've built a great long-term relationship with USPS because we use what we've learned on past projects to get better on each subsequent job. We've earned their trust.



## 2. DISCIPLINE IS PARAMOUNT

The USPS is a well-oiled machine calibrated to be as efficient as possible at all times. It's unique among federal agencies because it sustains itself. Therefore, every move it makes is calculated to make it more efficient as 21st century communication and retail trends continue to impact the arena in which the USPS operates.

Accordingly, these jobs come with intensely strict budgets and firm deadlines attached. Working with a customer as disciplined as the USPS requires equal discipline on our part. It takes a few different forms:

- Developing a rock-solid construction timeline, communicating it to everyone involved on the job and holding everyone accountable (ourselves especially included).
- Eliminating excess—whether it's extra supplies, equipment or even workers. Getting the job done well using only what we need has become standard operating procedure for our USPS teams.
- **Safety first**, no matter what. Tight deadlines and strict budgets tempt contractors to cut corners. And that's beyond misguided. The smoothest projects are those done without accidents or injuries.

That discipline was on display in New Orleans in 2007 as the city was still reeling from Hurricane Katrina. [Our restoration of a USPS Processing and Distribution Center](#) there was made significantly more difficult due to a labor and material shortage. Despite the strain, we wrapped up construction two months early and saved the Postal Service \$2 million in the process.





### 3. GOING THE EXTRA MILE IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS

Even with tough budget and deadline pressures that accompany USPS jobs, there are always opportunities to go above and beyond:

- Whenever it's feasible, we take advantage of great weather by working extended hours or overnight shifts to accelerate timelines.
- We'll also stay on the job through bad weather —as long as it's safe— to avoid construction delays.
- When necessary, we phase construction strategically so that a facility [can remain in operation](#) even as we build.

At every turn, our project managers stay in constant communication with USPS personnel in an unending search to find cost savings and add value to the job.

Going that extra mile has two main benefits. First, there's the immediate impact: Money is saved, timelines are shortened and a critical facility is built or put back online ahead of schedule. Second, it sets a precedent. The Korte Company's long



résumé of successful USPS jobs is proof that going above and beyond routinely leads to money saved and value added. Repeat business has followed—the USPS has come back to us nearly 50 times.

Take our work at the [USPS processing and distribution center in Spokane, WA](#), for example. We finished the 352,000-square-foot structure 68 days ahead of schedule thanks to our Build Smart approach to construction. Plus, by working around the clock down the final stretch, the facility's new Bulk Mail and Tray Mail systems were installed 18 days early.





## 4. COLLABORATION IS KEY

We think the difference between a good facility and a great one lies in the relationship between a contractor and its customer. These relationships touch all parts of a project, from building pre-construction trust to problem solving on the fly to checking off the last items on the punch list.

This extends to the relationships we build with subcontractors and vendors. One of The Korte Company's strengths is doing groundwork ahead of time, building reliable networks of construction partners to ensure every job is a job well done. It's a hallmark of the [Design-Build](#) method, which keeps all aspects of a job under one roof. It gives customers a single point of contact and everyone stays on the same page.

Sometimes, relationships are built at breakneck speed. That was the case in 2004, when an F-4 tornado toppled [the USPS General Mail Facility in Jackson, TN](#). We weren't the original builders of the site, but USPS turned to our [emergency services](#) team to start the rebuild process. We were on the ground the next day, and soon completed a 55,000-square-foot demolition and rebuild of the facility.



## 5. IT PAYS TO LEARN HOW EVERYTHING WORKS

In addition to the advanced machinery and lots of trained employees, USPS facilities feature fine-tuned processes that ensure the employees and machines carry out the agency's functions efficiently.

Our success on so many USPS projects wouldn't have been possible if we didn't put in some serious hours learning how it all fits together. On each job, we study important variables including:

- The facility's role within the greater USPS network.
- The equipment that will be utilized there (sometimes it's brand new and we settle in to do extra homework learning about it).
- The processes that dictate the way people and equipment interact within the facility.

As we mentioned in the previous section, close collaboration can make the difference here. The devil is in the details, and that means we lean on our local partners to learn as much as we can.

And it's not just for new construction. A number of our USPS projects have been renovations and expansions to existing sites. We've also done plenty of consolidation, moving the functions of multiple separate sites into one hub of activity. Anything less than an intimate knowledge of how it all fits together does a disservice to the customer. We've found it's well worth it to learn, learn and learn some more.





## 6. KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON THE LOCAL WEATHER

The U.S. features wildly varying weather across its geography. Having delivered dozens of USPS jobs from coast to coast and points in between, we've had to learn how to operate at our best no matter where we build. Some considerations are:

- Ensuring workers stay cool and hydrated on hot summer jobs in the south and southwest.
- Accounting for more rain days in regions —like the Northwest— where it rains more frequently.
- Being weather-aware on jobs in the Midwest where the only predictable aspect of the weather is how often it changes.
- Staying flexible wherever we build. We can try to control every aspect of every job, but we'll never tame the weather.

Construction methods and materials also vary across regions based on the environment in which they're built. Our experience building throughout the country means we've been exposed to the different ways to deliver a job well done.



And because we always take notes, we're ready to apply what we've learned to the next job. That ensures our best work is always ahead of us.

We're no strangers to harsh weather. Our work on the [USPS General Mail facility in Colorado Springs, CO](#) was complete three months ahead of schedule despite a tight deadline that had us working straight through winter in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

On the more extreme side, our crews were soaked by 58 inches of rain and buried in the biggest snow in a decade during the early stages of construction on a massive 800,000-square-foot [USPS Processing and Distribution facility in Portland, OR](#). We wouldn't have completed that project on time without the skilled corps of local subcontractors who kept right on working through the worst of it.



## 7. PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO LOCAL BUILDING CODES

Compared to the previous lessons we've shared, this one may seem a bit boring. But these local restrictions matter. A lot.

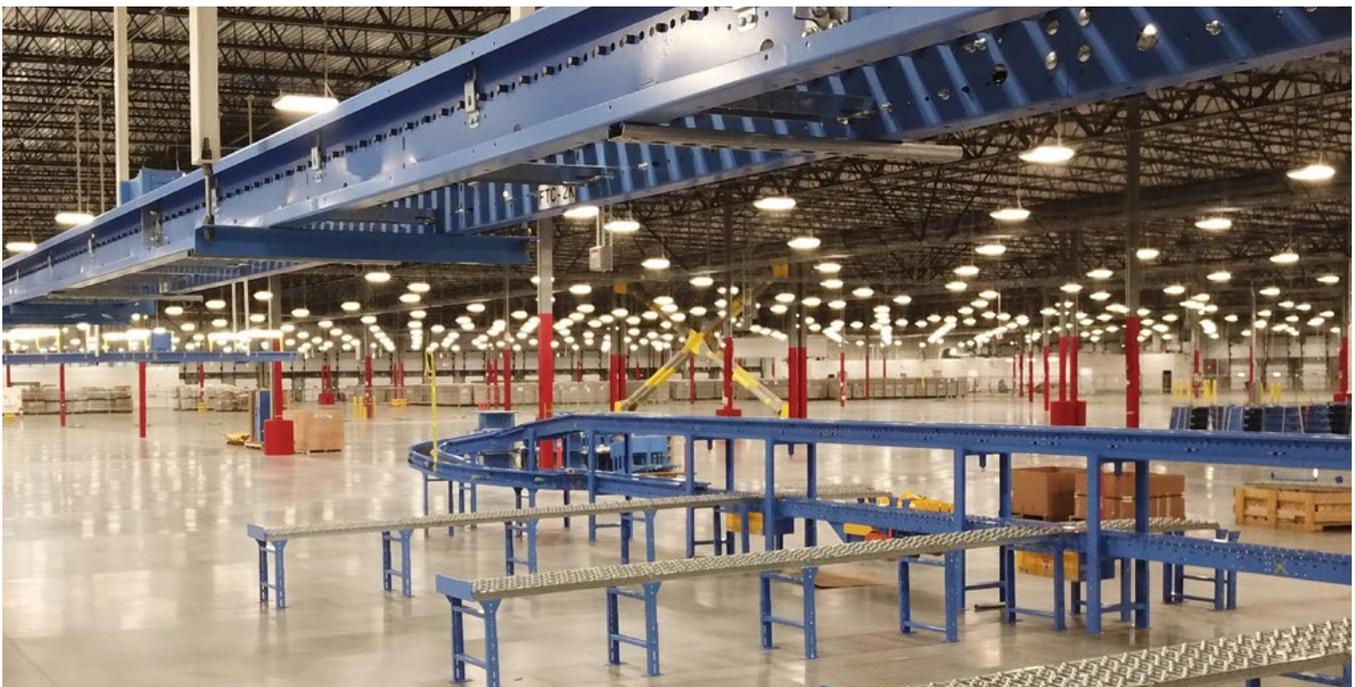
Local building codes are a mishmash of rules and regulations that jurisdictions enact to address unique problems or concerns facing them. Because these rules are far from universal, critical aspects of construction projects cannot be standardized. While USPS jobs are usually focused on efficiency, there's no template to follow here. We've had to dive into more local codes of ordinance than we can count, ensuring our work accomplishes the customer's goals while complying with applicable law.



Building codes have a bigger role in shaping construction than meets the eye:

- A jurisdiction's electrical code can have a ripple affect across an entire facility's electronic configuration. As a result, a facility's layout is often a function of the electrical or other infrastructure supporting it. Even substantially similar jobs can end up looking quite different depending on where they're done.
- The same is true with fire protection regulations concerning hydrants, sprinkler systems, entrances, exits and other areas where people or equipment are stationed. Typically, National Fire Protection Association standards form the backbone of fire protection codes, but they're often expanded upon further by local authorities.
- County or municipal rules regarding street or highway setbacks may mean parking lots and the entry and exit points for trucks must be custom-designed to follow the law. That, in turn, may force significant changes in floorplan for other parts of a facility as maximum efficiency is balanced against code compliance.

We've learned that thinking creatively about ways to meet legal requirements while keeping promises to our customer has been valuable for our teams. Knowing how to address these challenges makes us a more versatile construction company.



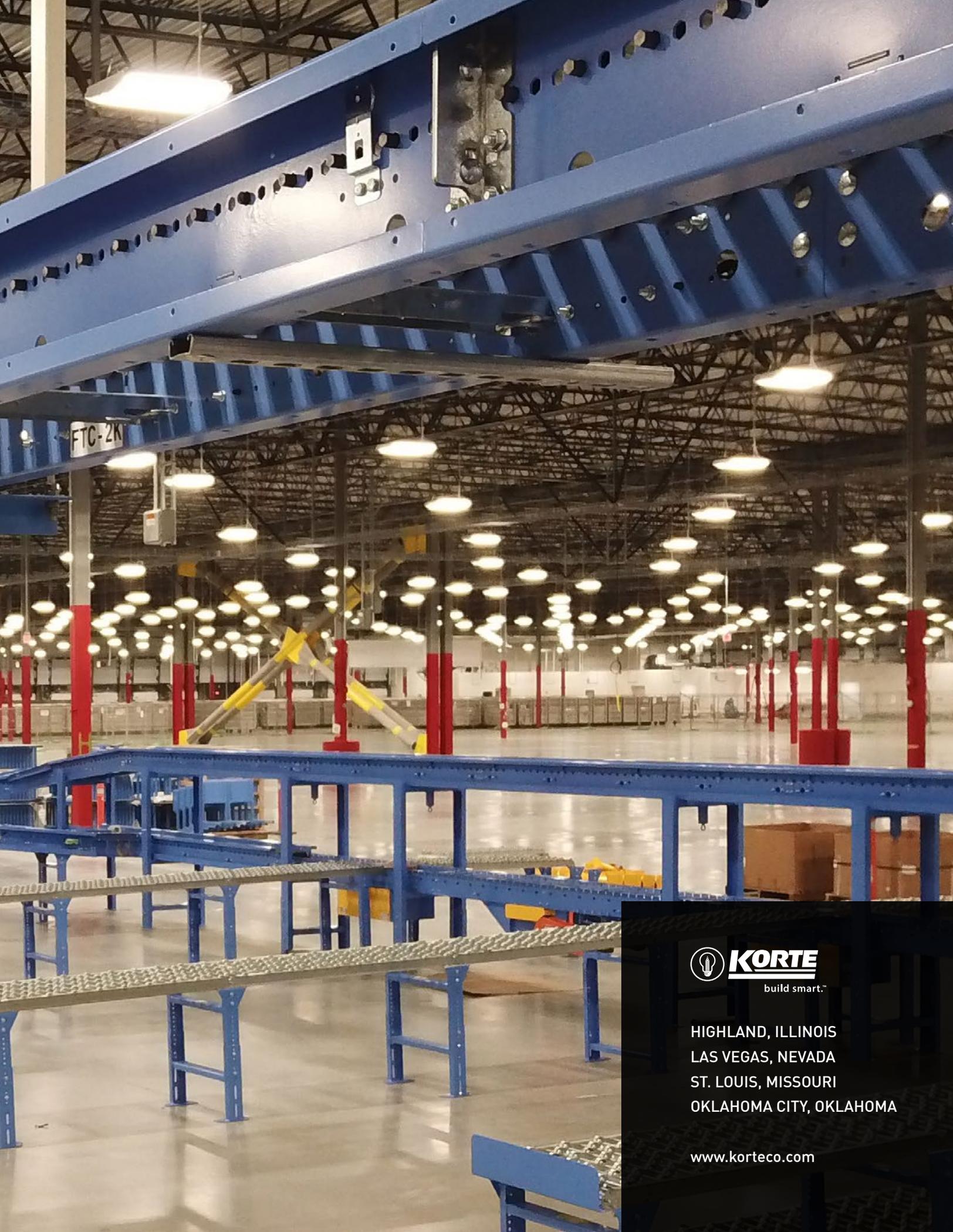


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It's been an honor working for the USPS. It's challenging work, but we like it that way. One of our goals is to get better at what we do after each job we deliver, and the USPS has proved to be a great learning partner. We owe them our sincere thanks.

We take these lessons learned with us everywhere we go, knowing we —and the customer— will be the better for it. [Let's talk about your next project.](#) We're hungry to learn and eager to get to work.



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