Escondido is a mid-size community with a large-size heart. Since 1894, the Escondido community has depended upon the public library for information, education and enrichment. The City’s single-location Escondido Public Library (EPL), a 56,000 square foot facility serving nearly 400,000 patrons per year, has always worked valiantly to keep pace with the demands of its diverse population and the fast-changing library landscape.

THE CHALLENGE: BALANCING EXCELLENT SERVICE & FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

The City of Escondido faced increased budget demands, but City officials remained intent on maintaining high service standards. Innovative thinking was crucial as City leaders recognized the need for excellent library services at lower cost.
One solution - outsourcing library operations - came to the fore. Plenty of evidence supported library outsourcing as a successful model as scores of California libraries have been operated by a private company for more than 20 years. Regardless, the community had its doubts. The momentum was interrupted when a group of passionate and boisterous community members protested the possibility of library outsourcing. Local media covered the controversy and the facts were lost in hyperbole and overshadowed by emotion.

City leadership felt it was their duty to deliver a financially responsible, yet excellent quality solution. In October 2017, City Council members voted to engage Library Systems & Services (LS&S) to assume library operation. While LS&S would more efficiently manage day-to-day operations, the City retained ownership of the building, books and materials, technology and equipment.

The outsourcing agreement proposed to save the City of Escondido $400K/year and $4M over ten years and included:

- Retention of all employees
- Addition of Sunday hours
- Deployment of contemporary library technology
- Enhanced user experiences & programming
- Improved collection analysis & cataloging
- Development & execution of a strategic plan
THE PLAN: OPTIMIZING LIBRARY OPERATIONS

The transition of library operations was completed in January 2018. From the commencement of the transition to continuing day-to-day operations, LS&S works closely with City staff to ensure alignment. After guiding 20 library systems through this transition, LS&S understood the value of retaining staff members who had been at EPL for many years and forged close ties with the community. Regular patrons, who knew and liked the staff quickly realized that those relationships would not change.

The staff, who are now free from back office operations, are able to focus on offering educational programs, providing outreach in the community and spending one-on-one time with patrons. Staff report being able to continue doing what they love and do well, with the support of managers equipping them to do better. Interaction, collaboration and idea sharing with peers across all LS&S libraries provide unique and invaluable benefit while staff, who know the community best, manage daily operations locally.

Volunteers, always an EPL strength, continue to give of their time and talent. EPL enjoys the support of more than 200 volunteers and five support groups—Library Board of Trustees, Friends of the Library, Escondido Library Foundation, Friends of Literacy and the Pioneer Room Friends—and has for many years. That support continues as hardworking volunteers operate the EPL Bookstore and assist with numerous other activities across the library.
THE IMPACT: IMPROVED ACCESS & SERVICE FOR THE COMMUNITY

Through partnership between LS&S, the City and library staff and stakeholder groups, EPL has been able to offer the community many new benefits:

- Addition of Sunday Hours & Expansion of Weekday Hours
- 21% Increase in Visits
- 97% Increase in Program Attendance & 60% Increase in Number of Programs
- Self-Check & RFID Implementation
- Streamlined materials ordering & processing
- New technology including 3D printing and virtual reality
- Expanded Community Outreach Partnerships & Programs:
  - San Diego Discovery Children’s Museum for museum membership passes that can be checked out
  - Escondido EcoVivarium for ‘Read to the Dragon’ program where children can read aloud to living reptiles at the museum
  - Read Local, Shop Local to promote local shopping with a discount for library card holders

“Our partnership with LS&S is focused on ensuring that the Library offers an open, welcoming environment, with excellent services that best suit our community,” states Jeffrey Epp, Escondido City Manager. “With LS&S, continuous improvement, efficiency and innovation are the standard. We have already been able to realize these benefits and clearly see how the partnership enables us to be nimbler in tackling the challenges of today and tomorrow.”
THE FUTURE: MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS TODAY & TOMORROW

EPL's Board of Trustees and City leaders, who have been pleased with the progress, acted to solidify a plan for the future. LS&S collaborated with EPL and City staff, library volunteers and the community on a strategic plan to guide the Library for the coming five years. EPL's first-ever strategic plan, delivered and adopted in July 2018, was met with strong stakeholder approval and charts a course to growth and enhanced service to the community.