

Save Our Escondido Library Coalition

January 7, 2019

Mayor and City Council Members
City of Escondido
201 N. Broadway
Escondido, CA 92025
Via Email

RE: Deficiencies of the Escondido Public Library Strategic Plan 2018-2022

Dear Mayor McNamara and Council Members,

We hope you had an enjoyable holiday season with your family. We are looking forward to working with all of you in the new year.

While there are many important issues related to Library Systems and Services' (LS&S) operation of our library, we were asked to review their Strategic Plan, and here offer our comments.

As you know, part of the requirement of the contract is for LS&S to produce a strategic plan for the library. The Plan is to be approved by the City Council and the Library Board of Trustees.¹

Unfortunately, the Escondido Public Library Strategic Plan (EPLSP) as submitted by LS&S is less a strategic plan and more a public relations document. As a five-year strategic plan for our library, it is grossly deficient and highly misleading and misrepresentative in many ways.

We urge the City Council and the Board of Trustees to reject this Strategic Plan because it does not meet minimal professional standards, is incomplete, unmeasurable, and unworthy of the considerable funding the public is providing to LS&S.

Specifically, we have the following concerns. See below for a more detailed explanation of each point, as well as examples from other libraries with more professional strategic plans.

1. The plan commits to very little that is specific or measurable.
2. The plan does not even include the requirements laid out in the contract.
3. The plan does not include basic requirements of a strategic plan or a typical, reasonable services agreement and includes no deliverables.
4. The plan lacks staffing commitments.
5. The most specific actions in the plan require more money.
6. The plan does not allow for adequate assessment of performance or progress.
7. There are additional problems that render this plan unsupportable.

¹ Attachment A to Professional Services Agreement, Section 12 (a)). The City needs to remind LS&S of this. At the Trustee meeting on July 17, 2018, they told the Trustees that the Council did not need to approve. Further, the October 18, 2018 minutes of the Trustee meeting where the Plan was supposed to be discussed are **still** not on the website.

1. The plan commits to very little that is specific or measurable.

The goals, objectives, and tactics are so vague they have little meaning. In fact, even the “tactics” listed in the plan are not committed to. The statement in the EPLSP, “*Example tactics illustrate the types of activities that will be employed*” (EPLSP, p. 5 emphasis added) means they are not committed to any specific activities, rendering the bulk of the plan meaningless and the public in the dark about what LS&S will actually do to implement the plan. The promise to do an implementation schedule in the future does nothing to remedy this deficit since there is no way of knowing what exactly they will be implementing. For the Council, the Trustees, and the public to know if this plan is acceptable or supportable or not, we must know what they **actually** propose to do, how, when, and by whom.

In one example, LS&S states they will support connections for people with shared interests, support strong neighborhoods with programs, and support civil discourse with programs (p.8), but the plan is silent on how many, where, which groups, which neighborhoods, and how often these activities will occur.

In another, LS&S states they will provide early literacy at WIC offices (p. 15) but they don’t say how often, when, for whom, staffed by staff with which qualifications. There are too many important details lacking, leaving us with a document of nice statements, but no plan.

2. The plan does not even include the requirements laid out in the contract.

Section 9 of the Scope of Work requires some specific programming commitments. That these are not specifically included in the 5-year plan is very troubling. These programming commitments must be included so that LS&S can be held accountable for at least these minimum requirements. See point 3 below as well as the section on example strategic plans for how these requirements can be worded in a specific, measurable way.

3. The plan does not include basic requirements of a strategic plan or a typical, reasonable services agreement and includes no deliverables.

A quality strategic plan would have objectives, strategies, and tactics that would be specific, with measurable metrics, and would include a timeline and deliverables. These are the **very basics** of an effective plan. Without them, we cannot know how well a plan is being executed or if it will meet our needs.

In addition, it lacks detail and metrics that a typical Service Level Agreement (SLA) would have. Every objective in the contract needs an articulated, measurable, and documented metric (see more on this below). LS&S should be required to meet monthly (or more frequently if necessary) with an assigned Oversight Entity, independent of LS&S, to review each objective and LS&S’s success or failure to meet the SLA objectives. The Board of Trustees could perform this task, if capable, but it would require a Board that understood its job of providing critical oversight of LS&S and acting like an administrative body, not as a partner or a subordinate.

In a normal process, all metrics would be designed by the client, not the contractor, to be specific and verifiable. LS&S would provide hard evidence that the objectives were met each month. If

any objective was not met for a clearly specified length of time, the LS&S contract would be terminated.

A metric should be created for each line of the contract and would **always** include:

- a. An articulation of each commitment in the Strategic Plan.
- b. Who will be performing the commitment.
- c. Frequency of the commitment.
- d. How success is measured for each commitment.
- e. Documentation of the regular meetings with the Oversight Entity including LS&S's attainment of the measured metrics and any improvements or changes made to the Strategic Plan. This should be a regular (monthly) report at the Trustees meeting and available to the public.

An example of how deficient the current plan is and how a proper metric should be written follows. One objective states, "Support student success by providing quality literacy and STEAM programs." (EPLSP, p. 8)

Instead, a quality, measurable, effective objective would should read something like "Conduct a monthly one-hour STEAM program for Escondido teenagers led by industry experts or high school science teachers (or whatever is standard). A sign-in sheet will document the number of attendees, and a post-program 5-point survey will be conducted by the Librarian to determine quality of program. Successful programs will have at least 10 attendees and rate an average score of 4 or better. Surveys and sign-in sheets will be turned in to the Oversight Entity each month."

This comparison demonstrates a major insufficiency of the current plan as this flaw is present throughout the plan.

4. The plan lacks staffing commitments.

Another major deficiency is the lack of a detailed set of staffing guidelines or commitments. The plan fails to provide a commitment to track and report:

- a. Overall headcount of staff.
- b. Detailed level of staff with education, language, and experience descriptors including years of experience ("The Skill Mix").
- c. Number of hours worked per week at each level.
- d. Whether the staff requirements are met each day through FT, PT, or temporary workers.

Further, there should be a provision that if the staffing levels are not met at any given time, LS&S would be required to refund to the city the unused staffing expenses. This would force LS&S to meet their staffing requirements so that unfilled positions don't turn into additional revenue for LS&S, and that the Library services don't suffer. This is a common requirement for outsourcing contracts. LS&S, not the public, should be responsible for temporary staffing costs that exceed the agreed upon staffing costs if staffing commitments aren't met.

5. The most specific actions in the plan require more money.

Anyone involved in this issue in 2017 remembers that cost savings was the stated primary goal. We could find very few tactics that could be said to be measurable (though they still have no timeframe or indication of who is responsible), such as “*Replace carpet and install air purification**” (EPLSP, p. 11). The problem is the asterisk at end of the tactic, which refers to the statement: “*These activities would require additional funding.*” (EPLSP, p. 13) It turns out that this applies also to way-finding signage (p. 11), food court, more outlets (p.12), shuttle to the East Valley Community Center (p. 15), printing resources (p.13), and removal of some checkout fees (p.15), and others.

In other words, the plan pretends to address some of the high priority issues from the public survey **but only if the city gives LS&S more money**. The Council should require LS&S to remove all actions they are not prepared to meet within the contract fee so that the public can know what actually can be expected for the funds committed. Otherwise, the public is misled about what they can expect in terms of services.

Outsourcers often rely on building their profits by asking to do work outside of the original contract. Because the original contract was vague and unmeasurable, and the Strategic Plan is vague and unmeasurable, the city may be forced to pay more to LS&S in order to meet the needs of the public. The City and Trustees should take a very dim view of this tactic on the part of LS&S. Incrementalizing costs is something LS&S has done before.²

6. The plan does not allow for adequate assessment of performance or progress.

It is quite revealing that the section on measuring performance is only a half of a page long and includes no measurements or metrics specific to the Escondido Public Library. Even the reference to the “*Traditional library metrics*” is not meaningful since there is no discussion of what metrics we are trying to achieve for our specific situation. We have no idea what numeric or quality goals they propose to meet so we have no idea if they are performing well or not. The objectives should be designed as listed in point #3 above, so success can be measured. This is another fundamental flaw in this plan, rendering it insufficient to meet our needs and it should therefore be rejected.

7. There are other problems that render this plan unsupportable.

- The recommendation that a new library is warranted appears to be justified merely by Escondido’s projected population growth. Their analysis is contained in two paragraphs (p. 24). This is an overly simplistic view that should be discounted. It does not discuss public support, if one main or multiple branch libraries is a better fit, and a myriad of other considerations.
- Data for findings listed in the document have dates that are not aligned and the discrepancy is not explained. Forecast data for programs and attendance includes the data

² <http://mailtribune.com/news/top-stories/library-wants-out-of-contract>

from April-September, 2018. The data for Visits, Circulation, E-book, media, computer sessions, and WiFi sessions covers only January-March, 2018.

- It is unclear from the Plan how the Neihoff donation is planned to be used, or not. The use of the Capital Projects Fund is not accounted for specifically in the Plan either.

A quality plan is possible: Examples from San Diego County and Riverside.

It isn't as if other libraries have this same kind of generic, commit-to-little, unmeasurable strategic plan. The San Diego County Library is a worthy comparison. A review of the County Library's Strategic Plan Roadmap clearly demonstrates how defective and inadequate the EPLSP is. Just compare the generic and non-committal "*Grow Services to non-users*" of the EPLSP to goals, objectives, and deliverable of *3.8 Expand Digital Literacy to New Americans* on page 13 of the County Plan. http://www.sdcl.org/PDF/sdcl_strategic-roadmap_2014-17.pdf

While the County puts off policy and plan development to a future date, they do specify what future date and which numerical goals they are trying to meet, e.g., *Objective 2.1: A Technology plan to double access in library in 5 years; Objective 2.3: Loan of e-readers to double each year to a goal of 100 additional e-readers in 3 years; Objective 1.4: E-circulation annual increase of 10% a year to a target of 300,000 by end of the plan.* Each of these is a time-designated, measurable, and focused objective. All include personnel assignments and other features of an appropriate objective.

Even the LS&S-operated Riverside County system has a strategic plan better than the EPLSP. It, at least, includes some measurable objectives (however still without timeframes and other key info). For example, in the *Children and Teens* section they commit to these measurable actions

- *All libraries will hold Dia de los Ninos/Dia de los Libros events*
- *2 additional libraries will offer bilingual storytimes*
- *Each manager or youth service staff person will contact 2-5 schools to arrange visits to school sites or class visits*
- *10 large libraries will offer training sessions for students on database use including Brainfuse*
- *The library system's 3 Zone Managers will identify for each library in their area of supervision organizations with similar goals such as preschools, tutoring centers, teen centers, etc. and encourage library staff to develop partnerships with these groups*
- *4 additional libraries will establish teen book clubs*
- *2 libraries will partner with community groups to provide after school tutoring i.e. Interact Clubs*
- *2 libraries will adopt Temecula Public Library's grant funded program providing services to those with special needs... (P. 17)*

What is clear from this comparison, is that it is not as if LS&S doesn't know how to do a plan, they just didn't do it for the Escondido Public Library—or here they don't have adequate oversight.

Last, there is some implication that LS&S should get credit for the Sunday hours. However, it is important for our new Council members to understand that the prior city staff asked if they could

implement Sunday hours and were not allowed to do so, even though they proved it could be accomplished without additional staff and funds.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments in advance of any decisions being made about continuing the LS&S contract. If you have any questions or seek additional comments, please contact us or email us at SavesEscondidoLibrary@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Brenda Townsend and Christine Nava
For the Save Our Library Coalition

cc. Library Board of Trustees