The Context
YouthWorks is a state-funded youth employment program administered by Commonwealth Corporation (CommCorp)—a quasi-public Massachusetts state workforce agency.

Massachusetts is one of the only states in the nation to invest early work experience program for low-income young people. The program, which began in the late 1990’s, has served more than 44,000 teens and young adults since 2007. Operated by the state’s 16 workforce investment boards and associated youth-serving partners, the program has grown from a few cities to 31 low-income communities.

The Challenge
Until 2012, the primary component of the YouthWorks program was subsidized employment. Local partners provided a variety of pre-placement training, but only a few of the programs used a formal curriculum. The information provided differed city to city. It was clear that the program needed a consistent curriculum to deliver a high quality education experience to prepare young people for future success.

Identifying a suitable curriculum for a statewide program for diverse teens and young adults with multiple challenges that included poverty, lack of educational resources and in some cases court-involved, early parenthood, and involvement in the foster care system proved challenging.
The Solution
To better meet the needs of YouthWorks participants who, like most teens, are having a difficult time finding and keeping jobs, CommCorp developed the Signal Success curriculum. Signal Success helps participants succeed at work, explore careers and showcase strengths in resumes and interviews.

In order to ensure success and promote ease of use, the Signal Success program provides a full set of materials including lesson plans, activities, Power Point slides, and assessment tools as well as support in the form of training and coaching. Local YouthWorks partners quickly became strong collaborators and advocates of the curriculum. Requests from partners led to versions to support development of leadership abilities and the challenges of youth with additional barriers.

The Impact
Signal Success has become a critical piece of infrastructure for the MA YouthWorks program. As a result of the curriculum and training, YouthWorks partners across the state have shared learning objectives, facilitation standards, and metrics to help teens and young adults progress from subsidized to unsubsidized employment. Now, young people in the program are better prepared and partners report that the skills learned have helped young people retain their placements and even get hired at the end of the program.

Local programs are pleased they do not have to reinvent the wheel every season to develop materials for the work-readiness component of the program. The workshop environment now looks different than it did before the introduction of Signal Success. Young people are engaged in working out scenarios together, working in groups to practice teamwork, and writing reflections on their work experiences.

Signal Success helped YouthWorks Partners:
- Align Learning Objectives
- Improve Facilitation
- Increase Preparedness
- Promote Soft Skill Gain and Future Planning

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www.signalsuccess.org