Collaboration Math is a tool intended to help organizations from diverse disciplines work together. It enables them to better understand each other’s perspectives and to identify the strengths and gaps in their partnership. This tool is designed to eliminate misconceptions, clarify the benefits of collaboration, suggest what needs to be better understood or studied, and identify key players that may be missing.

Each group in a collaborative provides key information about its organization according to a common set of categories. Specific categories vary based on the particular collaboration; however, typical examples include:

- **DEFINITION OF PROBLEM**: What language does each organization use to define the issue?
- **KEY ISSUES**: What are each organization’s priorities relating to the issue?
- **DATA**: What information does each organization collect, and how does it collect it?
- **FUNDING**: What funding sources and other resources does each organization bring?
- **TRAINING**: What expertise can each organization share with other participants; who does each organization typically train?
- **PARTNERS**: With what other types of groups is each organization connected?
- **SOLUTIONS/OUTCOMES**: What specific objectives has each organization set in relation to the issue?

Once the information is compiled, a facilitator can help the groups compute the “math.” For example, entries in the Data column can be “added”: in other words, collaboration greatly increases the amount of information available to each of the participants. Entries in the Definition column are “averaged”: for diverse groups to work together, a common way of defining and speaking about the issue needs to be agreed upon. Training “multiplies” the capacity of the individual groups and of the coalition: by sharing expertise and methodologies, participants strengthen their ability to achieve success. And by “dividing” up the responsibility for the overall work, the efforts required of each group are diminished. This “math” typically plays out as conversation and analysis during which groups discuss how they can make best use of their diverse backgrounds and resources.

The benefits of collaboration grow exponentially as more groups are added and more categories explored. A sample of a partial Collaboration Math matrix is on the next page.
The above groups come from very different backgrounds, but it should be noted that the Collaboration Math tool could also be used to facilitate collaboration between similar organizations, such as various agencies within a public health department.

Collaboration Math has been piloted successfully across the country to facilitate the early stages of collaborative work. However, because it pools and clarifies the diverse perspectives of coalition members, Collaboration Math also lays the foundations for comprehensive strategy development. In that sense, the Collaboration Math tool is designed to complement and inform Prevention Institute’s Spectrum of Prevention, a tool that promotes multifaceted activities as the best practice for effective prevention. By working through Collaboration Math, participants will see the fruits of their efforts grow exponentially.

Please note that since this tool is still in development, we ask that it not be disseminated, and would appreciate any feedback regarding its use and effectiveness.