Beyond the one-time workshop: Building sustained Communities of Practice for AI in teaching- October 5, 2026

As generative artificial intelligence rapidly reshapes education, Dr. Suparna Chatterjee, Assistant Professor of STEM Education at New Mexico State University, is working with teachers to integrate AI into content-specific instruction to deepen disciplinary knowledge, strengthen critical thinking, and create meaningful learning experiences. Her research sits at the intersection of STEM education, teacher preparation, and educational technology, helping teachers move beyond how AI tools work toward developing the knowledge and critical perspectives to decide when, why, and how to use AI with students.

A major part of this work is ongoing professional development with K-12 teachers in NM, supported by the Spencer and Leza Foundations. Through a multi-year research and PD initiative, Dr. Chatterjee and collaborators have worked with roughly 50 teachers across four NM school districts to explore generative AI's possibilities and challenges, design and implement content-specific AI-integrated activities, and create resources for informed AI teaching practices. "Teachers need opportunities to experiment, reflect, collaborate, and develop critical AI literacy within authentic educational contexts" said Chatterjee. As schools and universities develop policies governing generative AI, Chatterjee argues that policy alone cannot prepare educators for the complexities of AI-supported teaching; educators need training, time, support, and community.

This research is part of a broader effort to rethink technology integration in STEM education. By equipping educators with practical AI skills and critical AI literacy, Chatterjee's work helps prepare students for emerging technologies in their future professional skills. To extend this impact across the state, she has partnered with the NM STEM Innovation Network, established in August 2025 as a statewide collaborative supporting STEM Education, which aims to empower students, educators, and communities, especially rural, tribal, and Pueblo communities, by centering NM's local cultures and strengths, building an inclusive STEM ecosystem, and connecting K-12 education to the state's growing STEM industries.

The NM STEM Innovation Network knows powerful STEM ideas take root when educators receive sustained support, not just one-off workshops. The Network connects K-12 educators,

higher ed institutions, OST providers, Tribal and Pueblo education leaders, and industry partners working together over time, focused on three big priorities:

- Inquiry-based STEM and mathematics in every classroom
- High-quality OST STEM opportunities, especially in rural and tribal communities
- Stronger connections to local STEM industries and career pathways

Underneath those priorities are three pillars: building capacity, fostering collaboration, and strengthening STEM identities and readiness. In practice, this means investing in people and partnerships that sustain the work beyond a grant period, not just funding isolated activities.

The 2026-27 Mini-Grant program puts that vision into action. NM schools, education cooperatives, OST providers, higher ed institutions, for- and non-profit organizations, and industry partners can propose projects addressing inquiry-based math, OST STEM, industry connections, and/or AI literacy.

Mini-grants are designed to extend and scale the kind of classroom-based environment and reflection central to Chatterjee's work. The RFP encourages projects that introduce data and algorithms through hands-on STEM inquiry, explore AI's role in local industries and community challenges, use AI tools to support, not replace student thinking and reasoning, and offer professional learning for educators, staff, and families on AI guidance.

By funding teacher and community driven projects that integrate AI into real disciplinary learning and local contexts, the Network's mini grants help build the sustained communities of practice needed for thoughtful AI use in New Mexico classrooms.

Learn more about the NM STEM Innovation Network and 2026-27 funded mini-grant projects at steminnm.org.