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Two Teams Tie for Top Honors in Bright Electronics Manufacturing Challenge 2026 Round 1

Michigan Tech and UMass Lowell Teams Each Claim \$1,000 Prize as 10 Finalist Teams Advance to National Finals at SMTA International

EDEN PRAIRIE, Minn. — The Electronics Manufacturing & Assembly Collaborative (EMAC) today announced the Round 1 results of the Bright Electronics Manufacturing Challenge 2026, and for the first time in the competition's history, two teams tied for first place. Team "Copper Country Huskies" from Michigan Technological University and "Team Fishies" from the University of Massachusetts Lowell each earned top honors for an exceptional Printed Circuit Board (PCB) design, a creative and thoroughly documented added feature, and outstanding engineering detail. Both teams will receive the full \$1,000 Round 1 cash prize.

A Tie Worth Celebrating

Competing among a national field of 31 teams, 124 students, and 14 schools, the Copper Country Huskies and Team Fishies distinguished themselves with functional, efficient, and manufacturable PCB designs built to serve as the brain of their competition robots. Both teams' custom added features stood out to industry judges for their creativity and depth of documentation.

"These two teams captured exactly what we hope to see in the next generation of electronics professionals," said Tara Dunn, EMAC Director of Training and Education. "Their work blended technical precision with forward-thinking innovation, problem-solving, and attention to detail that fuels real progress in electronics manufacturing. This is the mindset that will shape our industry's future."

From Design to Reality: The Journey Continues

Having conquered the design phase, the Copper Country Huskies and Team Fishies join eight other finalist teams advancing to Round 2 and the Final Challenge at SMTA International, taking place October 27–28, 2026, at the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center in Rosemont, Illinois. In Round 2, finalists will hand-assemble and solder their PCBs on-site, competing for a \$500 cash prize. Round 3, the Final Challenge, will see teams bring their completed robots to life in a live competition for the \$2,000 grand prize.

The 2026 finalist teams advancing to SMTA International are:

1. Copper Country Huskies | Michigan Technological University
2. Team Fishies | University of Massachusetts Lowell
3. Driftless | University of Wisconsin – Platteville
4. Space Bulls | SUNY Buffalo
5. Copper Fangs | St. Mary's University
6. Reno Kings | University of Nevada, Reno
7. Surface Mounted Bulls | University of South Florida
8. GND_Hogs | University of Minnesota
9. AJA | University of Minnesota
10. Indiana Tech PCB Warriors | Indiana Institute of Technology

Alternate teams have also been notified and remain on standby should a finalist team be unable to advance:

1. M.O.S.F.E.T. | St. Mary's University
2. Buff Bots | SUNY Buffalo
3. DoubleE | University of Nevada, Reno

About the Bright Electronics Manufacturing Challenge

The Bright Electronics Manufacturing Challenge 2026 is an immersive, multidisciplinary competition in which student teams design, assemble, and test custom printed circuit boards to control competition robots. The challenge provides participants with professional-grade tools, industry mentorship, and authentic manufacturing experience, culminating in a live robot competition at SMTA International.

Sponsorships and volunteer opportunities are currently available. For more information about the Bright Electronics Manufacturing Challenge 2026 and to get involved, visit www.electronicsworkforce.com/2026brightchallenge or contact Tara Dunn, tara@smta.org. For details about SMTA International Conference and Exposition, visit www.smtai.org.

About EMAC

The Electronics Manufacturing & Assembly Collaborative (EMAC) connects partners in education, industry, and economic development to build a skilled workforce that meets the evolving demands of the electronics manufacturing industry. Through innovative programs like the Bright Electronics Manufacturing Challenge, EMAC bridges the gap between academic learning and industry application. SMTA proudly supports EMAC's efforts to educate and inspire the next generation of electronics manufacturing professionals.

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