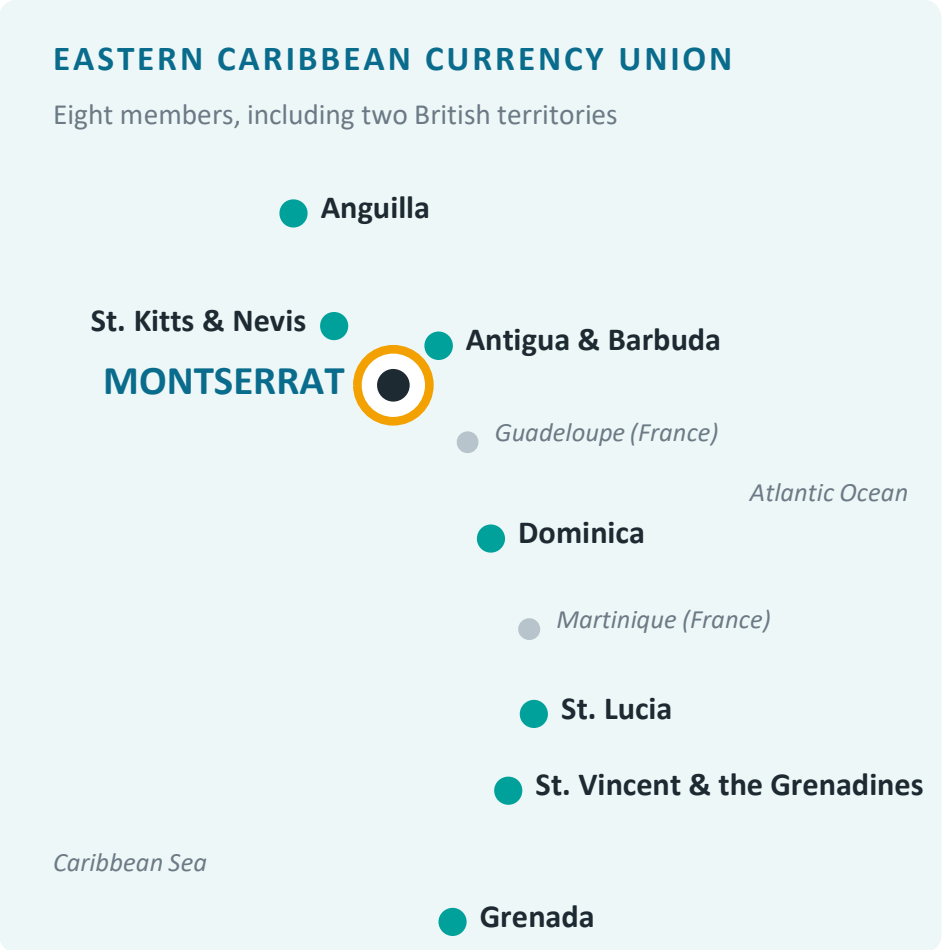
From Montserrat to the Diaspora

Storytelling, Cultural Memory, and the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank's Big Push

Wendell C. White
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20th Annual Antigua and Barbuda Country Conference
November 12–13, 2026



Montserrat within the Currency Union; French islands in grey for reference

The remittance is changing form

From what families sent • to what they built • to what they can share

01

Survival

Money and goods



Money orders from England and barrels from New York kept households fed, children in school and roofs repaired.

02

Investment

Property and capital

Remittances built houses, bought land and started small businesses. Savings became investment.

03

Talent

Skills and ideas

Expertise, networks, ideas and capital from the second, third and later generations.

Barrel: AI illustration

The next stage depends on something no ministry can buy: a living connection to the island. It begins with stories.

The Big Push: Seven Theatres of Transformation



Graphic: Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, eccb-centralbank.org/the-bigpush

EC$34B

combined GDP target for the Currency Union, double today's, within ten years

~7%

annual growth required, against roughly 2% recently

Where does the diaspora fit into these seven theatres?

The Big Push's missing question

"Culture and skills are often the greatest barriers to transformation."

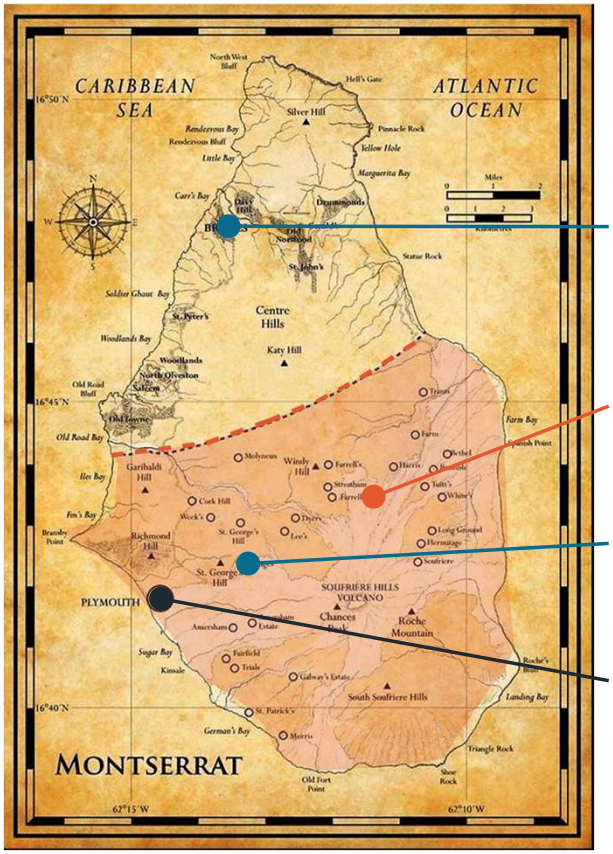
ECCB Strategic Plan 2026–2031

"New mindsets, stronger skill sets, bold policy choices, and coordinated investments."

ABSA 2026 call for papers

Where do the mindsets and skills come from? The plan never mentions the diaspora or remittances.

An island that cannot renew alone



Map: BBC · dashed boundary shown as published

MONTSERRAT TODAY

~12,000 ▶ **4,325**

residents before the 1995 eruptions

estimated residents, 2025

16.1%
Under age 15

19.9%
Age 65 and older

More seniors than children. Shares of residents, 2023 census.

"How do you grow and double the size of an economy with a falling population?"

Governor Timothy Antoine, ECCB, at the plan's launch

Most of Montserrat lives abroad

4,325

people living on Montserrat

2025 estimate, Statistics Department

24,600

Montserrat-born emigrants living abroad

2020 estimate, UN ECLAC

40,000+

Montserratians overseas with ties to the island

Government of Montserrat estimate

The figures count different groups, from emigrants born on the island to everyone connected by birth, marriage, heritage and kinship. Either way, the diaspora is many times the size of the island.

Always a nation abroad

The routes changed. The movement, and the ties that endured, continued.

BY SEA



Pre and Post WW migration

The Windrush generation sails for Britain; money orders flow home

1960S



Blackburne Airport

Air travel opens the way to New York and beyond

1970S–80S



An expanding air link

Families travel both ways; children are sent home to grandparents

1995–97



Forced departure

Soufrière Hills erupts; Plymouth is buried; more than two-thirds leave

TODAY



Continued connection

Small planes via ANU and SXM connect the region and diaspora

From journeys made in search of opportunity to departures made under the pressure of displacement.

A global network, connected to home

The diaspora is more than a source of remittances. It is a source of capacity.



Investment · Expertise · Markets · Mentorship · Relationships

Fifty-one voices

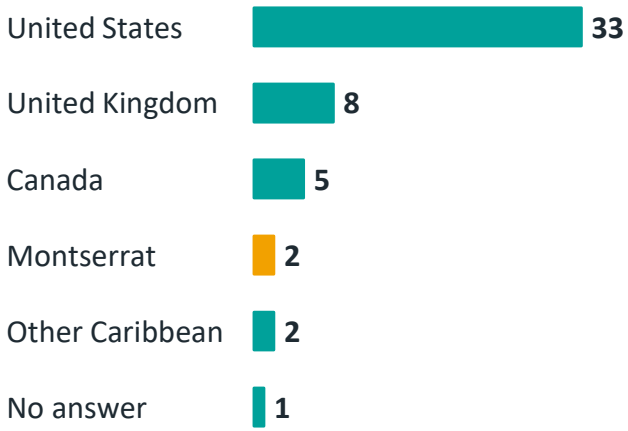
Whose voices are we hearing?

51

people with ties to Montserrat responded

Online survey
October 9 – November 1, 2026

WHERE THEY LIVE



WHO THEY ARE

27 born abroad to Montserratian parents or grandparents

22 born on Montserrat or lived there

Two more are married to Montserratians.

A voluntary survey, not representative of the whole diaspora. Its value is in the perspectives it captures; island residents and people under 30 are underrepresented.

Orphans of memory

Enslavement and colonial rule cost us most of our ancestors' memories. **We cannot let our children become orphans a second time.**



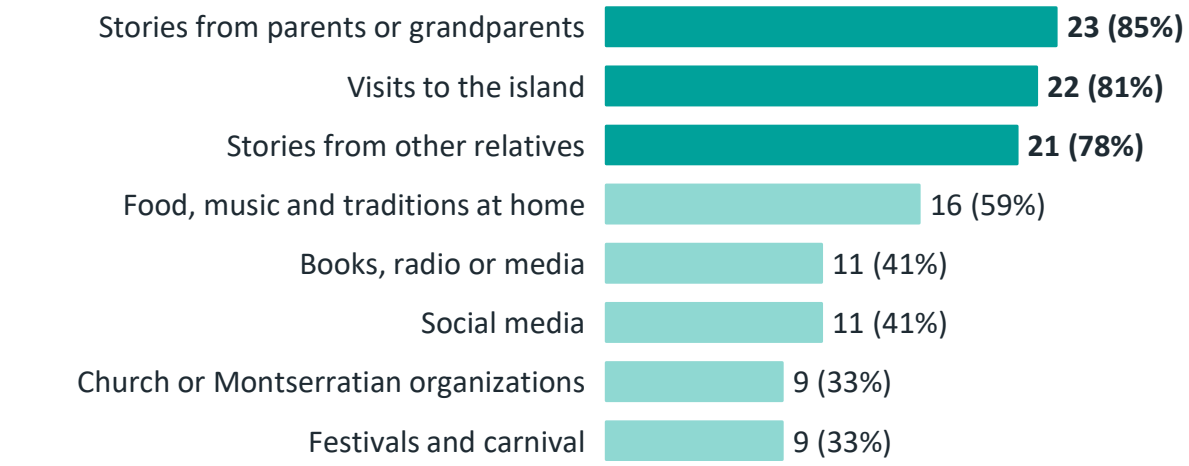
Elder generation



Second, third and fourth generations, born abroad

Carrying the memory, and receiving it

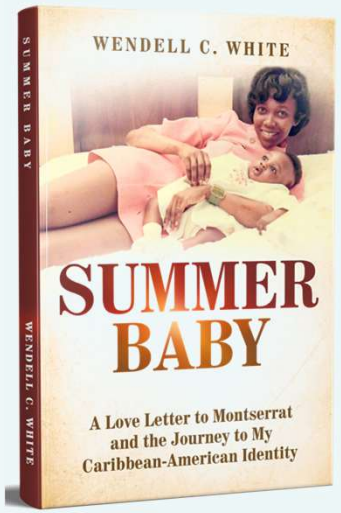
HOW THE 27 BORN ABROAD FIRST LEARNED ABOUT MONTSERRAT



Respondents born abroad (n = 27); select all that apply, so answers overlap

"Learning about who and where you come from will add fuel to whatever future you are planning." — survey respondent

Stories for every generation



THE GENERATION THAT LEFT, AND THEIR CHILDREN

Summer Baby (2024)

A memoir: from the Bronx to Montserrat as an infant, back to New York, and a lifelong quest to embrace a dual Caribbean-American identity.



GRANDCHILDREN AND GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN

Abby & Andy (2025)

A New York girl and her cousin raised in Montserrat, in the mid-1980s, before the volcano.

Caribbean Christmas (2025) · Save New York City (December 2026)

"How many people in your neighborhood know your name?"
An island girl to Abby

A child reading Abby & Andy today will be an adult in the 2040s: the next visitor, investor, professional or returnee. Her sense of belonging is being formed now.

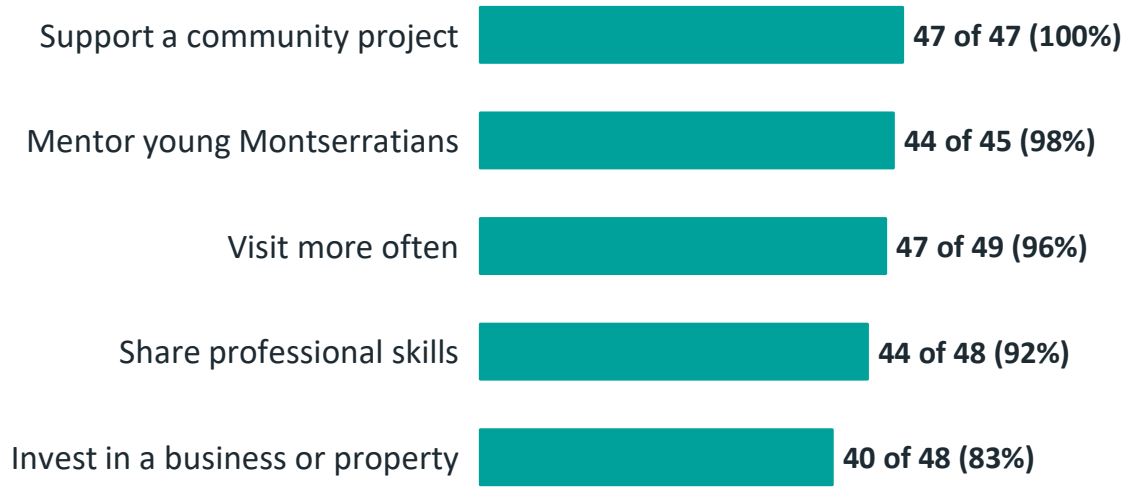
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Willing to give more than money

The remittance of talent

If a clear opportunity existed, how likely would you be to…?



Very or somewhat likely, of respondents who answered each item

THE TALENT POOL

Respondents' professional fields

Business and finance	21
Health care	15
Government	12
Education	8
Technology	7
Arts, media, culture	7

Respondents could name more than one field

The willingness to contribute is already there. The opportunity must be made clear.

The missing piece is a channel

INFORMATION

Did not know what opportunities exist, or had no clear way to offer their skills

Born abroad to Montserratian parents or grandparents



78% 21 of 27

Born on Montserrat or lived there



18% 4 of 22

ACCESS

41 of 51

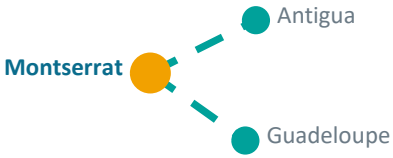
named the cost of travel or limited flights and ferries

"As our family grows the cost to reach the island is becoming unrealistic and other islands become more viable options."
Parent born abroad

The heritage generation is willing but uninformed. Willingness was never the missing ingredient. A clear channel, openness from current residents and relationships they can trust are among the cited barriers.

Bandwidth as the new connector

How the diaspora stays connected, and how those who know Montserrat only through stories can explore it before they visit and contribute.



The cable

Since 2020, a subsea fibre link to Antigua and Guadeloupe. About 60% of people in the Currency Union have high-speed access.

Montserrat could "step up and become a content creator."
Cable project director, 2020

Expertise without borders

Coding, billing and analytics are done remotely for U.S. hospitals every day, and Montserrat shares a clock with the U.S. East Coast much of the year.

A finance professional in London can mentor a young entrepreneur in Brades.

Culture online

Festival, St. Patrick's Week and cricket can reach a child in the Bronx or Birmingham. A diaspora that watches Festival online is more likely to come home for it.

"More Montserrat events being broadcast live (video) or uploaded to YouTube."
Survey respondent, United Kingdom

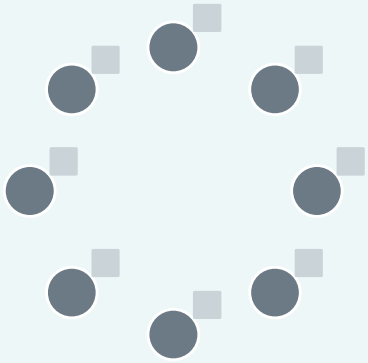
Connectivity creates opportunity. Reliable electricity makes it possible.
In 2020, 96.7% of Montserrat's electricity came from imported fossil fuels. Fibre must be matched by a resilient grid: renewable generation with battery storage, and local capacity to maintain it.

FROM DIASPORA TO REGION

Small islands do better together

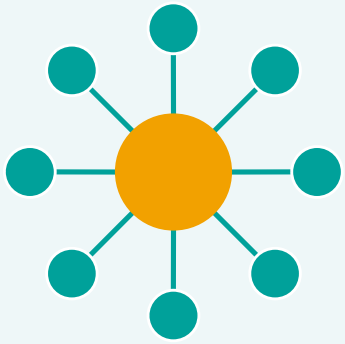
Abroad, we became Caribbean people first: in New York, Toronto and Birmingham, friendships and marriages crossed every island line. The diaspora learned long ago what the region is still learning.

- **Share, don’t replicate**
- **Credit the partnership**
- **Open to every member**



Each island alone

Eight copies of the same service



The region together

One shared service, open to all

Our success depends less on what each island builds alone than on the partnerships we build across the region.

Already working: Antigua and Montserrat

A regional resource does not have to be owned by every island to benefit every island.



2011

Emergency lifeline

An EU-funded CARIFORUM project built an emergency ferry dock in St. John's, Antigua, to allow evacuation and relief supplies if Montserrat's volcano erupts again.

IPS, November 2011



2014

A stated ambition

The two governments announced a Joint Commission on scholarships, joint ownership of a sand barge, tourism, agriculture and putting government services online.

CARICOM, December 2014



TODAY

Shared forecasting

The Antigua and Barbuda Meteorological Services issues Montserrat's daily and four-day weather forecasts, so Montserrat does not have to build that capacity alone.

Antigua and Barbuda Meteorological Services

The principle is not new. The challenge is to make it a deliberate, sustained way of working across the region.

Regional Health care: share, don’t replicate

THE REGION

> *“No island should have to build alone what all of us can share.”*
>
> OECS health ministers’ meeting, Montserrat, October 2026. Ministers agreed to examine shared cancer and paediatric services.

- **Martinique**
  Agreement in principle to take time-critical emergencies around the clock
- **Guadeloupe**
  25 minutes by air; university hospital expected to receive patients by December 2026

THE DIASPORA

Extending the partnership

19 of 51 respondents work in health care or health and wellness

14 of 15 health care professionals, all in the U.S. or Canada, would be likely to share their skills

Village 664 is building a registry of Montserratian medical professionals abroad.

An island of 4,300 people need not build every specialty itself. It can reach its neighbors, and its people abroad.

Six steps for leaders

1 A single front door

Build on the government's diaspora registry: a skills bank that matches needs to people

2 Belonging made simple

A heritage route to status for descendants; St. Kitts and Nevis opened one in November

3 Cheaper investing and giving

Clear land rules and less hassle on duty for donated goods

4 Connections, not just cable

Current information online, livestreamed events, resilient power

5 Heritage travel

Trips for second and third generations, timed with Festival and family reunions

6 Stories in classrooms

Fund books, oral histories and recorded elders across the Currency Union

Across the Currency Union

Count the diaspora in national data · One shared skills platform, not eight · Shared services no island has to build alone or claim as its own

“Montserrat has so much potential, but it needs manpower. It needs us all.”

Survey respondent who grew up on the island



Building at home
New national hospital, Montserrat



Building together
OECS health ministers, Montserrat, October 2026. Photo: ZJB Radio



My mother’s barrel crossed the sea once a year, and she spent the rest of the year filling the next one. What the next generation sends home need not wait for the season. It can flow all year, by cable, by plane and by story.

The griot carries a people’s memory forward, so each generation can decide who it will become.

The Montserratian who left, the child born abroad and the grandchildren who know the island through stories are fully a part of the national story. The task is to make sure that, wherever home is experienced, there is a meaningful way to help build its future.

Thank you

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https://wendellwhitewriter.com/

Thank you to the 51 people who shared their stories in the survey.

The books

Summer Baby (2024)

Abby & Andy: Caribbean Christmas (2025)

Abby & Andy Save New York City -

coming December 2026

WendellWhiteWriter.com

Amazon author page