

Why is ARPA Canada “Reformed” and focussed primarily on the Reformed community?

The mission of ARPA Canada is to educate, equip, and encourage Reformed Christians to political action, and bring a biblical perspective to our civil governments.

As the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) Canada has become better known, we are increasingly asked about the “R” in ARPA. For those outside of the Reformed Christian community, there is intrigue about what Reformed means, and how that distinguishes our political action. The questions are sincere and the questioners are generally satisfied by our responses.

But frequent questions also come from those within the Reformed Christian community, particularly from those who are concerned that we are being unnecessarily exclusive, or not taking advantage of an opportunity to have a greater impact. *“Why can’t it simply be a “Christian” organization?” “Won’t this work be more effective if we do it in unity with all those who share our convictions, regardless of church affiliation?” And, “even as a Reformed organization, why single out the Reformed church community in your mission statement?”*

By God’s grace, ARPA Canada’s work has been principled and at the same time effective. It has been focussed and yet continues to have a broad impact. We are also privileged to have a warm relationship of mutual trust and respect with thousands of people beyond the Reformed community. It is an immense blessing to work alongside so many other devoted Canadians who share a common heart for justice, righteousness, love, truth, life, and freedom.

From when we started in 2007 until today, the board of ARPA Canada has steadfastly maintained that the “R” in ARPA speaks both to who we are and who we are primarily directed towards. At the same time, and as explained further below, we are grateful to be a blessing to so many others, while remaining committed to this Reformed foundation.

In this article we desire to bring greater understanding to why we are committed to this foundation and direction and why we see evidence of the blessing of the LORD on it.

ARPA Canada is explicitly Reformed because:

1. ***The Reformed theological basis is faithful and true:*** If we desire to communicate and exemplify grace and truth, we need to have a clear and correct understanding of what grace and truth are. ARPA Canada is grounded on God’s infallible Word, and we believe that doctrine contained in the [Three Forms of Unity](#) (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort) fully agrees with the Word of God. These confessions are fruit of the Great Reformation of the 16th & 17th century, when the church returned to the Word of God as the only authority for church and life. Today too, Reformed believers desire to use the Word of God as the only authority in life, for church, state, and society. In other words, we are Reformed not just because of who we strive to reach, but also in who we are. Our board and staff are required to share this

foundation and be members of a confessional Reformed church. We strive to be united in the truth.

2. ***Our distinct theological basis strengthens, rather than limits, ARPA's work:*** We are blessed to work within a Christian community that governs itself through time-tested confessions, forms, and church orders that also speak directly to our calling as Christians in public life. As a result, ARPA is able to give unique and robust arguments to our civil governments. For example, in the 2018 [Wall](#) case, [ARPA's intervention and arguments](#) were particularly helpful to the Supreme Court because Reformed churches continue to faithfully practice church discipline, which was a central focus of the case. In the [2018/2019 court case](#) in Alberta in response to their government's imposition of Gay Straight Alliance activities on Christian schools in the province, our confessions and Church Order were able to demonstrate to the court why the government's actions violate the core of our identity. This strong theological foundation adds a clarity and nuance that goes far beyond vague claims of religious freedom.
3. ***Every successful venture needs a clearly defined purpose. The founders of ARPA Canada started the organization to equip the Reformed church community in Canada to faithfully engage in political action.*** When ARPA Canada started, there was a great deal of cynicism and apathy among this community in regards to political awareness and action. We wanted that to change. We are grateful that ARPA Canada's work has been a catalyst for political awareness and action within the Reformed church community in Canada, but we also know that this is an ongoing effort and should not stop. In fact, there is still a lot of room for improvement, and the original mission remains relevant.
4. ***There are significant practical benefits to having a focussed target audience:*** Not only does ARPA Canada focus on the Reformed church community, we specifically focus on particular denominations within this community (generally the NAPARC churches). This is only about 150 churches, which is a small fraction of the Canadian Christian population. This focus has massive advantages including:
 - a. *We are able to build relationships with the people we are seeking to educate, equip, and encourage.* Relationships take time and focus. Since we started this work, trust has grown so that we now are blessed with incredible receptivity to, and support for, our mission (local ARPA groups driven by volunteers, large turnouts at events, open invitations to present in churches and schools, the ability to share our publications in these churches, etc);
 - b. *The relationship of trust translates into action.* This relatively tiny group, when mobilized, has accomplished a lot - thousands of political actions annually! We also now see Reformed Christians active as MLAs, MPPs, MPs, and town counsellors;

- c. *The relationship of trust has given us the means to exist.* This small community has given generously, so that ARPA Canada's budget could grow from almost nothing to well over a million dollars annually today. It is important to note that ARPA Canada's healthy financial state is in direct contrast to most other Christian political advocacy organizations in Canada, which are constantly struggling with a lack of finances and lack of support from Christian churches, even though their missions and potential support bases are far broader than ours.
- d. *In community, action inspires action beyond the initial impact.* If ARPA Canada were to disappear tomorrow, the impact would continue for a long time. An entire community is educated and equipped. Cynicism and apathy have been replaced with experience and hope.

5. *The challenges that come from having an overly broad target group would dilute our effectiveness:*

- a. Due to limited resources (staff, budget, volunteers, energy) and massive potential mission (3+ million Canadian Christians, federal, provincial, and municipal politics, legislatures, courts, and tribunals, and a host of issues) decisions have to be made about how to best use these resources. It is better to have a clear and focussed mission that can realistically be achieved than an idealistic mission that is not practical or sustainable.
- b. A large membership on paper likely means that the relationship with the target audience is impersonal. This can lead to cynicism and frustration, as both the organization and the audience expect much from the other but get little.
- c. An organization that is focussed on numbers or size easily loses mission focus. Resources are given to increasing growth rather than working faithfully with what we have. The temptation is great to translate numbers into power, but we are not pursuing earthly power through force or might, or for our own purposes.
- d. Every successful mission will be pressured to expand to those who want to benefit from it. If ARPA Canada expanded its target audience to include all those who identified as Reformed, there would be pressure then to expand to all those who identified as Christians. And if we went that far, there would be pressure to work more closely with orthodox believers of other religions who share common values. Pressure to expand our mission doesn't mean this has to be a constant question to be entertained. This is why it is so valuable for our organization to be governed by a board that is on guard against [Mission Drift](#).
- e. ARPA Canada has been able to grow specifically because the Reformed community has stood behind us with its time, open doors, and finances. We cannot assume this to continue if we direct our mission beyond it, as finite

resources will inevitably mean that less will be devoted to the community that made our existence possible.

Our Broader Audience & Impact

By no means does this focussed audience mean that ARPA Canada is being exclusive or isolationist. Our work is also directed well beyond the Reformed community. Through ARPA Canada, the Reformed community has made a disproportionate contribution to the Canadian public square. As is often the case when an organization accomplishes its mission effectively, our work is having a momentous and positive impact on the broader community:

1. ***The second part of our mission is devoted entirely to bringing a biblical perspective to our civil governments (provincial and federal legislatures and courts).*** We devote a great deal of time and resources to communicating with this audience that usually does not share our faith. In spite of our small constituency, we have become one of the largest and most active Christian political advocacy organizations in Canada.

Since our identity is Reformed, our staff makes every effort to make the light of God's Word shine on every issue in the public square. The Word of God being central to all our endeavours, we seek to show this biblical perspective overtly or by articulating biblical principles, explicitly or implicitly.

2. ***Through targeted campaigns, our work directly reaches the broader Canadian public.*** For example, ARPA Canada started and continues to oversee the WeNeedA^{LAW}.ca campaign, which is a leader in the Canadian pro-life movement and is the primary means through which Members of Parliament work to advance pre-born human rights. In addition, we regularly contribute to mainstream media outlets (through interviews, press releases, and articles).
3. ***When resources allow, and when doing so doesn't undermine our principles, we assist and advocate on behalf of the broader Christian community.*** For example, with the [Loyola case](#), we led an intervention on behalf of 314 different Christian schools representing a wide range of Christian traditions.
4. ***When it can further our mission, we speak at or have ARPA tables at conferences and events from a wide range of other organizations and religious communities.*** This might include political party conventions where we can interact with politically-minded Canadians, speaking at a March for Life, or presenting at an apologetics conference about the Reformed perspective on the role of the state.
5. ***We intentionally make our resources available freely and widely.*** Our website gives access to anyone interested in our publications and work, and we encourage the use and sharing of our materials. Thousands of non-Reformed people are blessed by our publications, social media, website, and EasyMail system. Others are also always welcome to attend any of our public speaking events.

6. ***We communicate regularly with other organizations to listen to, learn from, encourage, and assist each other.*** Leaders of other Christian organizations regularly praise ARPA Canada's work and share it with their respective communities and networks, as we likewise share their work with our network.

Singling out the Reformed Christian community is an intentional, missional decision for ARPA Canada. We are incredibly grateful for the shift we have seen in this community toward increased political engagement, and we are continually humbled by their generous support in so many ways.

At the same time, we are so grateful to be able to do this work alongside so many others in this nation who share our goals. We have benefitted enormously from them and hope to continue to be a mutual blessing to each other.

We are keenly aware that all of the blessing we have witnessed on ARPA Canada's growth and public impact has been by God's grace alone. We also recognize that we can continue to do a better job of honouring God in the public square and look forward to improving in the days and years to come.