In 2012, Sarah Rosen Wartell became the third president of the Urban Institute since it was founded in 1968. Urban is an economic and social science research and policy organization whose 450+ researchers, experts, and other staff share a belief in the power of evidence to improve lives and strengthen communities. During her tenure, Urban has articulated its strategy to "elevate the debate" by: bringing more of its insights from research to federal, state, and local government and practice; becoming a leader in research communications and data visualization; and undertaking an ambitious program of business systems and technology modernization.

Previously, Wartell was deputy assistant to the president for economic policy and deputy director of the National Economic Council. At the US Department of Housing and Urban Development from 1993 to 1998, she advised the federal housing commissioner on housing finance, mortgage markets, and consumer protection. Later, she was a consultant to the bipartisan Millennial Housing Commission.

After government service, Wartell was the founding chief operating officer and then executive vice president of the Center for American Progress. Her work focused on the economy and housing markets, and she directed the Mortgage Finance Working Group and "Doing What Works" government performance program. Prior to her tenure in government, she practiced law with the Washington, DC, firm of Arnold & Porter.

Wartell currently serves on the board of the Center for Law and Social Policy, and on Bank of America’s National Community Advisory Council. In the past, she has served on the boards of the Low Income Investment Fund, Center for Urban Science and Progress at New York University, and CFED. Her areas of expertise include community development, consumer finance, asset building, and housing finance.

Wartell has an AB degree with honors in urban affairs from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. She has a JD degree from Yale Law School.